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Palestinians get international code

GAZA CITY (AP) — The Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have been assigned their own international dialing code — 970 — in a first step toward setting up their own communications network, a Palestinian official said Monday. The Israeli telecommunications company Bezeq has been providing phone services to the Palestinians, and the international dialing code for the areas under Palestinian control is the same as the one for Israel — 972. Khader Salim Laham, the Palestinian deputy minister of communications, said the Palestine Telecommunications Company, which will start replacing Bezeq in January, "This is a very good step and this will give us the opportunity to go ahead to build our Palestinian communication network and disconnect from the Israeli one." Mr. Laham said of the new international dialing code.

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Paris confirms Assad's brother in France

PARIS (AFP) — The younger brother of Syrian President Hafez Al Assad is in France on a private visit, the French foreign ministry said Monday commenting on a report that he had been exiled over a scandal. Jamil Al Assad was reported by a Kuwaiti newspaper to have been exiled because his illegal activities drew protests from Syrian and foreign business leaders. "A short-stay visa valid for three months has been issued for Jamil Al Assad, who is a businessman, and who is accompanied by members of his family," said ministry spokesman Jacques Rummelhardt. "For us it is a private visit for the purposes of tourism," he said, commenting on a report in the Kuwaiti newspaper Al Rai Al Am last Friday. The report, citing "very well-informed" diplomats in Paris, said Jamil's family and close friends had been forced to join him in France. He arrived in Paris on Dec. 22, the paper said.

PLO gets \$1.79m from Saudi panel

RIYADH (AFP) — A Saudi fundraising committee for the Palestinians has transferred almost \$2 million to the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), its director said Monday. Abdul Rahim Jamus, director of the People's Committee for Aiding the Mujahadeen of Palestine, said his group sent 6,783 riyals (nearly \$1.79 million) to the PLO's Palestine National Fund. The sums transferred to the PLO every quarter are deducted from the salaries of some 200,000 Palestinians living in Saudi Arabia but are also provided by Saudi and foreign volunteers. The Saudi government announced in September that it had given \$100 million to the Palestinian National Authority as part of its contribution to financing Palestinian autonomy in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

Ghali to return home on Friday

CAIRO (AFP) — Outgoing U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Ghali will return to Egypt on Friday, the Egyptian news agency MENA said Monday. Mr. Ghali, who was the head of the United Nations for five years, will be replaced at midnight Tuesday by Ghana's Kofi Annan after his bid for a second term was vetoed by the United States. The 74-year-old former Egyptian diplomat plans to write a book on the Camp David peace treaty between Israel and Egypt in March 1979, and another on the United Nations, according to a spokesman.

Sudanese 'copter' downed on Eritrea border

KHARTOUM (AFP) — A Sudanese air force helicopter has been shot down and its three-member crew killed on the border with Eritrea, the armed forces announced on Monday. General Mobammad Al Sanousi Ahmad, a Sudanese armed forces spokesman, said the helicopter was on a "security mission" when it was shot down by "intensive fire" from within Eritrean territory. The spokesman did not say when the incident at Rubsum near the border took place. Eritrea has given shelter to Sudanese opposition groups grouped within the national democratic alliance which has said its aim is to topple the government of President Omar Al Bashir.

Amnesty slams Lebanon arrests

BEIRUT (AFP) — Amnesty International on Monday denounced as illegal the arrests this month of Christian opponents to the Syrian-backed Lebanese government after anti-Syrian attacks. "Arrests were carried out by the military or military intelligence, without warrant, contrary to the Lebanese criminal procedure code," Amnesty said in a statement. "Some of those released earlier reported that they had suffered torture including electric shocks and suspension by the arms for many hours. None of those arrested is known to have been formally charged." The Amnesty statement was written before the Lebanese government's representative at the military court announced the decision to release seven of the 11 Christians opposed to the government who were seized in a wave of arrests which followed four anti-Syrian attacks over the past two weeks.

Israel-PNA agreement could be signed today

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (Agencies) — An Israeli-Palestinian accord on the handover of the West Bank city of Hebron rule to Palestinian rule may be signed on Tuesday, Israeli and Palestinian officials said as they held a decisive round of talks.

Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's deputy, Mahmoud Abbas, both appeared upbeat as they arrived at a hotel here for the negotiations to be joined later Monday by U.S. mediator Dennis Ross.

"We expect to conclude all of the subjects between the Palestinian and the Israeli side and to be very close to a situation where both sides can sign an agreement," Mr. Mordechai told reporters.

Asked whether there would be a meeting later Monday between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Mr. Arafat, Mr. Mordechai replied: "I

expect it would be in a very short time but I don't expect it would be today."

Mr. Abbas told reporters "There are some issues which the negotiators are exploring today."

"I hope we'll finish them today or tomorrow," he said. "If we finish them, there will be a signing tomorrow."

Asked whether an agreement on a partial Israeli troop withdrawal from Hebron could be signed later Monday, Mr. Abbas said: "I don't think so today, I hope tomorrow."

Middle East troubleshooter Ross was to resume his intense mediation of the Israeli-Palestinian talks in a bid to wrap up a deal before the New Year and was scheduled to meet Mr. Arafat in late Monday.

Mr. Ross was in Washington over the weekend to brief U.S. President Bill Clinton on the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, which saw a burst of new movement last week after

weeks of treading water.

Mr. Mordechai met Sunday night with Mr. Arafat in the Gaza Strip and afterwards both men spoke of a meeting soon between Mr. Arafat and Mr. Netanyahu to seal an agreement.

Mr. Arafat called his talks with Mr. Mordechai "positive and constructive" but said security issues surrounding the Hebron handover remained to be resolved.

Mr. Arafat said Sunday before meeting Mr. Mordechai there were still "difficulties" over Israel's main demands for security arrangements in the city, including the creation of buffer zones around Jewish settlements and limitations on weapons for Palestinian police.

Another outstanding issue is a new demand by Mr. Arafat that his police have a role alongside Israeli soldiers in security at the Ibrahim Mosque, a holy

(Continued on page 7)

Security Council rebukes Iraq in standoff over missile engines

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — The U.N. Security Council called on Iraq Monday to stop blocking the transfer to the United States of more than 100 missile engines amid heightened concerns about Iraq's missile capability.

In a formal statement, the 15-member council said it "deplores the refusal by Iraq to allow the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) to remove approximately 130 missile engines from Iraq for analysis by a team of international experts under the Special Commission."

The statement, reflecting a consensus among all the council members, pointed out that "Iraq is required to allow the special commission to remove the missile engines from its territory."

The UNSCOM arms inspectors want to bring the parts from Baghdad to the United States for analysis in order to check Iraq's claims that all its missiles with a range of more than 150 kilometres have been

unilaterally destroyed.

Under U.N. resolutions, UNSCOM must confirm the destruction of all Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, including the long-range missiles which could threaten Iraq's neighbours, before a crippling six-year old oil embargo can be lifted.

The Security Council noted on Monday that Baghdad's latest refusal, which comes after a series of standoffs with the U.N. inspectors in Iraq since March, "complicates the implementation by the Special Commission of its mandate."

The tough U.N. trade sanctions were imposed following the August 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. An oil-for-food arrangement currently in force is a temporary exemption to the sanctions regime.

Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz proposed in a letter last Wednesday to UNSCOM chief Rolf Ekeus that the components could be analysed in Russia, which is where the Scud missiles originated.

But Mr. Ekeus told reporters here Monday that computerised reconstruction of the missiles could only be done at a U.S. laboratory in Huntsville, Alabama, although other tests might be carried out in other European countries.

Mr. Ekeus said that the laboratory tests would be crucial in verifying Iraq's claims concerning the number of missiles destroyed, particularly as the Iraqi government had earlier this month admitted that it had attempted to dupe the arms inspectors.

Mr. Ekeus said one Iraqi official present at the UNSCOM chairman's last talks with Mr. Aziz in Baghdad admitted to personally placing an Iraqi-made engine in a destruction site "to inflate the number of destroyed missiles."

UNSCOM is increasingly concerned that Iraq is con-

tinued on page 7)

Chances of negotiated end rise as Lima hostage crisis grinds on

LIMA (R) — Fired by weekend progress in contacts between the Peruvian government and rebels holding 83 hostages at the Japanese ambassador's home, speculation mounted on Monday about possible new efforts to end the standoff.

The hostages, including President Alberto Fujimori's brother Pedro, Peruvian police and government officials and about 20 Japanese businessmen, spent a 13th night in the hands of the rebels.

The Red Cross and the Japanese government appeared confident that a first face-to-face meeting on Saturday between the rebels and a government envoy had kicked off a negotiation process that was likely to prove long and gruelling.

In Tokyo, Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, while warning against over-optimism, said he believed it was now "possible to have a dialogue with the rebels."

International Committee of the Red Cross mediator Michel Minnig, who until Saturday had been the main contact between the residence and the outside world, told Swiss television on Sunday that he thought "a threshold has been crossed with the establishment of direct communication between the government and the Tupac Amaru" rebels.

He expressed the hope that more such contacts could be arranged soon, and Peruvian media speculated that Mr. Fujimori's negotiator, Education Minister Domingo Palermo, would return to the residence on Monday to speak again with the rebels.

There was no government comment on the possibility of renewed contact with the guerrillas of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA), who took over the residence on Dec. 17.

In virtually the only new development on Sunday, the rebels placed three

signs in an upper window of the residence spelling out the reasons for their continued stand.

The signs read: "Our prisoners do not receive the same humane treatment — MRTA," "social fighters also deserve freedom — MRTA" and "the people want peace with social justice — MRTA."

The messages underscored a more conciliatory stance by the rebels in recent days, angling more for improved conditions for jailed comrades and recognition of their movement, as opposed to earlier demands for the release of all their prisoners in Peruvian jails and sweeping changes to the country's economic system.

Rebel leader Nestor Cerpa met on Saturday for more than three hours with Mr. Palermo inside the besieged residence.

The face-to-face meeting led to the release of 20 more hostages, bringing to

(Continued on page 7)

Premier assures capital market of measures to boost its operations

Government determined to see key economic bills enacted, Kabariti says during visit to AFM

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti said Monday that the government was seeking to give a new impetus to the operations of the Amman Financial Market (AFM) and hopes to introduce economic legislation governing the work of companies and securities as well as those that concern customs and intellectual property rights during the current parliamentary session.

"The government is anxious to see these laws endorsed in view of the important positive impact they will have on national economic development," Mr. Kabariti said during a visit to the AFM, where he met its director, Wahib Al Shaer, and other market officials and dealers.

"If, for some reason, the government be unable to win Parliament's approval of the package of economic laws during the current parliamentary session it has no alternative but to resort to constitutional instruments to pass them in view of their potential to stimulate the national economy," said



Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti on Monday speaks with dealers and investors in the Amman Financial Market during a visit he paid to the stock market (Petra photo)

Mr. Kabariti. That was a reference to the government's constitutional right to adopt temporary laws when the legislature is not in session.

Mr. Kabariti held a dialogue with AFM dealers on their requests and com-

plaints. He said the government was seeking solutions for their problems and urged them to convey their demands to the deputies, who, he said, can approve draft laws that stimulate the AFM's operations.

Following the meeting, Mr. Shaer told Jordan Television that Mr. Kabariti had expressed the government's support for a proposal by a Swiss federal bank to organise a confer-

(Continued on page 7)

Bahraini pilot defects to Qatar

DOHA (AFP) — A Bahraini air force pilot defected to Qatar in a helicopter on Monday and asked for political asylum, the Qatari Foreign Ministry announced.

Nasser Majed Nasser Al Khalifa, believed to be a member of Bahrain's ruling family, "has asked for political asylum in Qatar and the authorities are studying his request," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

There was no immediate reaction from the Bahraini authorities, who announced earlier Monday that an air force helicopter was missing.

The defection comes amid heightened tensions between the two Gulf states over a bitter territorial dispute and the conviction of two Qataris in Bahrain last week on spying charges.

Bahrain on Saturday pardoned the two Qataris — Fahd Abdullah Al Bakker, alleged to be a Qatari intelligence officer, and Salwa Jassim Mahmoud Fakhr, a woman he allegedly recruited as a spy — in a goodwill gesture.

Bahrain arrested the pair on Dec. 2 and accused them of collecting information about "military sites, armaments and the Hawar islands" in the Gulf — the subject of the decades-old territorial dispute.

(Continued on page 7)

Government defends imposition of customs duty on newsprint; newspaper prices go up Jan. 1

By P.V. Vivekanand
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The government recognises the need to exempt newsprint from all tariffs but it cannot afford to do so at present because of the financial constraints on the state budget, Information Minister Marwan Muasher said Monday.

The minister was speaking two days before a hike of 33 per cent in newspaper prices announced by publishers was to take effect.

The three Arabic dailies, Al Rai, Al Dusiour and Al Aswag, as well as the Jordan Times, the Kingdom's only English-language daily, will be sold at 200 fils instead of the present 150 fils.

The prices of weekly tabloids as well as political party newspapers are also expected to be raised with effect from Jan. 1.

The increase, according to the publishers, is warranted by a continued imposition of a 25 per cent customs duty on imported newsprint.

The duty, said Mohammad Amad, director general of the Jordan Press Foundation Company which publishes Al Rai and the Jordan Times, came on top of an increase in the international prices of newsprint in 1996.

"Our balance sheet for the year will definitely show the clear retreat in our overall income as a result of the price increases and the customs duty," said Mr. Amad.

Mr. Amad said the international price of newsprint dipped a little in the second half of 1996, but "not to the levels that prevailed in 1994."

The government exempted newsprint from the duty for the first six months of 1996 before reimposing it as of July 1. The short-term exemption preempted an increase in the price of newspapers with effect from Jan. 1, 1996.

Dr. Muasher, addressing a weekly news briefing, conceded that newsprint is exempt from all tariffs in almost all developing countries and that Jordan should

not be an exception. "We are very much in favour of encouraging literary life in Jordan and local publications," and believe that there should be no tariffs on newsprint, said the minister.

But, he said, "the government cannot simply afford" to extend duty exemption to newsprint at this point in time because it will deprive the Treasury of much needed revenues.

"We are cash-strapped," said the minister, in an implicit reference to the deficit in the 1997 draft budget of JD 1.9 billion.

Revenues from customs duties on newsprint are roughly estimated at nearly JD4 million per year.

Dr. Muasher said the government had "informed all publishing companies of its position" that it would extend duty exemption for newsprint "when the Treasury is in a position to afford that."

The decision to increase in the prices of newspapers

(Continued on page 7)

ROYAL JORDANIAN

ROYAL JORDANIAN has the pleasure to announce a new checking - in procedure, for First and Super Business Class passengers as of January 1st 1997. Complete departure formalities will be done at Terminal 1 on behalf of First and Business Class passengers, while they are relaxing at the CIP Lounge.

Israel wants to improve Mideast ties — Weizman

NEW DELHI (Agencies) — Israeli President Ezer Weizman on Monday said the Jewish state wanted to improve ties with its Middle East neighbours, adding he was optimistic for an accord on the control of the West Bank city of Hebron.

"It is not an easy problem ... Negotiations are going on and I am confident that a solution will be found in the very, very near future," he said on Hebron after receiving a ceremonial 21-gun salute here.

Mr. Weizman, who arrived Sunday on the first official visit by an Israeli head of state, met with Indian counterpart Shankar Dayal Sharma, Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda and Foreign Minister Inder Kumar Gujral.

The 73-year-old Weizman said he had telephoned Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai earlier Monday, who told him talks on the proposed pullout of Israeli troops from Hebron were "on the right track."

Indian Minister Gujral said Mr. Weizman told Deve Gowda Israel was keen on improving ties with its neighbours in the Middle East.

"Israel wants to improve relations with neighbours such as Palestine, Syria, Jordan and Egypt," Mr. Gujral, who attended the one-hour talks, said.

"The two sides discussed the Middle East and Israel's response was positive. They want to restore the peace process and agreements," Mr. Gujral said, adding New Delhi was "concerned" about the ongoing negotiations.

"We have conveyed our concern to Weizman. The president shares our concern," Mr. Gujral said.

Mr. Gujral earlier said the two countries discussed their concerns over terrorism, before adding: "Relations between India and Israel are cordial. We value his visit

here. We are already cooperating in various spheres including agriculture, and this historic visit will give a further boost to our relations."

Mr. Gujral said besides four agreements signed to boost cooperation in spheres such as agriculture, industry, science and culture, the two sides also decided to forge a partnership in the field of defence.

"In defence it has to be limited due to circumstances," Mr. Gujral said without elaborating.

Mr. Weizman's week-long trip brings him back to India, where he worked as a royal air force officer, after more than 50 years.

During his stay, Mr. Weizman will inaugurate an Israeli-funded model farm near New Delhi, and hold talks with Indian industrial leaders.

Trade between India and Israel has improved since January 1992 when the two countries established full diplomatic relations.

Trade between the two rose from \$200 million in 1992 to over \$600 million over the next four years, and India expects a 15-20 per cent rise in the 1996-97 financial year to March 31.

Mr. Weizman asked Indian officials to free seven Israelis jailed in New Delhi in drug-related cases, Indian officials said.

"The issue was raised but we don't want to comment on it publicly because it could spoil things," one official close to the talks between Weizman and Mr. Deve Gowda told Reuters.

Officials said two of the Israelis were sentenced to 10 years in prison earlier this month for peddling drugs. The charges against the other five were not immediately known.

There are two women among the seven, who have all been jailed during the last one year, they said.



ARMED SETTLERS: Two armed Jewish settlers pass a pair of elderly Palestinian men as they make their way to the Jewish settlement in the centre of Hebron in the West Bank on Monday. Reports said Monday that Palestinian officials and Israel were close to a Hebron deal and Israeli troops would withdraw from most of the town within a week (Reuters photo)

Sudan protests Mahdi's visit to Egypt

CAIRO (Agencies) — Sudan has protested at former Prime Minister Sadek Al Mahdi's visit to Egypt, saying Cairo's welcome for the exiled opposition leader did not show "good intentions" towards Khartoum.

Mr. Mahdi, who fled his homeland for Eritrea this month, visited Cairo Friday for the first time since 1987 on the opening leg of a three-month tour of Arab and European countries.

Egypt's charge d'affaires in Khartoum, Ramadan Al Sherif, was informed by the Sudanese Foreign Ministry of the government's "discontent," an Egyptian Foreign Ministry official said.

Sudanese officials also expressed "Khartoum's dissatisfaction" about the Sudanese opposition activities in Egypt, the official added.

Mr. Mahdi, Sudan's first

democratically elected prime minister, was toppled in a bloodless military coup in 1989 which brought an Islamist-military junta led by Omar Al Bashir to power.

The leader of the northern opposition party, Umma said he fled Sudan in early December to prevent the Sudanese regime from using him as a "hostage."

Meanwhile, former Sudanese President Mohammad Osman Al Mirghani, who leads the country's other main opposition party, the democratic Unionist Party, arrived in Cairo on Sunday from Saudi Arabia.

Relations between Cairo and Khartoum are strained, with Egypt earlier this month accusing Sudan of failing to take any steps to meet U.N. demands to hand over three Egyptians sought

in connection with the attempted assassination of President Hosni Mubarak in 1995.

However, Egypt has reservations about the alliance between Mahdi's Umma Party with rebels in the south of the country and its close ties with Eritrea.

Civil war has been raging for more than a decade in Sudan with the rebel Sudan people's liberation army led by Colonel John Garang fighting to end Islamic domination of the mainly animist and Christian south.

Egyptian government newspaper Al Akhbar on Monday criticised Khartoum's protest over the Mahdi visit, saying "the Sudanese government should rather close its doors to terrorist groups, which conduct plots against Egypt."

On Monday, Mr. Mahdi

called for the overthrow of his country's government, saying the ouster should be accomplished with the fewest possible casualties.

"The majority of the Sudanese people refuse the ruling regime and are looking forward to getting rid of it as soon as possible and with the fewest deaths," the Middle East News Agency quoted Mr. Mahdi as saying.

He spoke with reporters following a meeting with Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa.

Sudanese Foreign Minister Ali Sman Yaha dismissed Mr. Mahdi's moves to rally support for the opposition as inconsequential.

"All in all, the whole matter is a media campaign," he told Sudan's Akhbar Al Yom newspaper.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel linked to U.S. missile alert network

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel has been linked to a U.S. satellite network which provides real-time warning of the launch of ground-to-ground missiles, the Yediot Aharonot newspaper reported Monday. The Israeli air force has been provided with equipment directly linking it to the control centre of the satellite alert network in the western U.S. state of Colorado, the newspaper said. The network involves a satellite in geostationary orbit over Iraq equipped with sensitive devices which can detect the heat from a missile launch. Yediot said. It said Israel's recent connection to the network stemmed from a promise made by U.S. President Bill Clinton. During the 1991 Gulf war, Iraq fired a total of 39 Scud missiles at Israel, killing two people. At the time, the Israeli military was not equipped with launch-detection equipment and warnings of Iraqi Scud launches picked up by U.S. satellites were passed on to Israel by telephone. Israel and the United States are tied by a strategic cooperation agreement and are jointly developing an anti-missile missile system and an anti-missile laser.

Egypt rejects Israeli call for Lebanon troops

CAIRO (AFP) — Egypt has rejected an Israeli proposal to send Egyptian peacekeeping troops to South Lebanon if Israel withdraws from the area, Lebanon's Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri said Monday. "President (Hosni) Mubarak told me he rejected an Israeli proposal to send an Egyptian-Jordanian force to South Lebanon to maintain peace there in case of an Israeli withdrawal," Mr. Berri told the Egyptian newspaper Al Ahrar. "This proposal aims to isolate Syria, implicate Egypt and Jordan and avoid applying (U.N.) Security Council Resolution 425," which calls for an unconditional Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon, he said. Mr. Berri, who arrived here Sunday, has also met Egyptian Parliament Speaker Ahmad Fathi Surur. Israeli Internal Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani earlier this month proposed the deployment of Egyptian and Jordanian peacekeeping troops in South Lebanon following any Israeli withdrawal from its self-declared "security zone."

Court renews detention of suspected spy

CAIRO (AP) — Suspected Israeli spy Azam Azam Monday proclaimed his innocence to an Egyptian court, but the court renewed his detention for another 45 days while investigation of the case continues. Azam, a 35-year-old Israeli Arab, was arrested Nov. 4. He is accused of recruiting an Egyptian to spy for Israel and giving him T-shirts soaked in invisible ink to use in writing reports. Azam told the supreme state security court he was innocent, saying he was a mechanic who knew nothing of invisible ink or spying. He repeated his claim that he knew the Egyptian man only slightly. Azam and the Egyptian suspect, Imad Abdul Hamid, have not been officially charged. The prosecution has to demand an extension for their detention every 45 days. Israeli officials have repeatedly appealed for Azam's release, but President Hosni Mubarak has said he cannot interfere since the case is in the hands of the judiciary.

Tajik opposition leader visits Iran

TEHRAN (AFP) — The leader of Tajikistan's Islamic opposition, said Abdullah Nuri, discussed here on Monday the peace process in his country with Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati. Mr. Velayati told a joint press conference with Nuri after their meeting that they had "efficient and constructive" talks on ending the civil war in the central Asian country. He said representatives from the Tajik government and the Islamic opposition were to meet here Sunday to discuss implementing a peace protocol signed in Moscow last week. The accord, reached between Nuri and Tajik President Emomali Rahmonov, was on the status and key functions of a "national reconciliation commission." Mr. Nuri told reporters that the composition of the commission, holding general elections in Tajikistan, incorporation of opposition forces into the army and a general amnesty would be on the agenda of the talks in Tehran.

Man kills son in UAE after dispute with wife

ABU DHABI (AFP) — An Arab man in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) suffocated his baby then used a knife to slit his throat after a dispute with his wife, local newspapers reported on Monday. The 30-year-old man from the northern emirate of Ras Al Khaimah told police he had killed his two-and-a-half year old boy to take revenge on his wife. The papers said the man, identified only as M.S., was epileptic and would undergo tests to determine if he is mentally ill.

Once a symbol of peace, Egypt-Israel bus cancelled for lack of passengers

CAIRO (AP) — For the operators of the bus route between Egypt and Israel, there was no payoff from peace. The last regularly scheduled bus from Cairo to Jerusalem left Monday, the service cancelled for lack of customers.

Only seven passengers and two Egyptian security agents carrying machine guns were aboard the unmarked bus when it departed, after a dog checked for explosives and two police cars took up escort positions.

Israel's Egged Bus Company had started the service with its Egyptian agent, the

East Delta Bus Co., on April 15, 1982, a symbol of the potential for more normal relations between Arabs and Jews.

The hoped-for expansion of tourism, commerce and friendly interaction never materialised after the historic signing of the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty, the first between an Arab country and Israel.

Egypt remains a mediator in the Middle East peace process but relations are cool, with President Hosni Mubarak now sharply critical of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Ordinary Egyptians and Israelis

continue to view each other with suspicion.

There are still tour companies operating bus trips between Egypt and Israel as well as direct flights, and two border crossings are open.

But after the peak period in the 1980s when Egged ran four round-trips a week, the company reported a dramatic drop in passengers, especially during the last two years.

Only two round-trips have been scheduled recently, and Egged said it is losing \$1,000 per trip.

"If the Israeli company was losing, we were losing

more," said Mohammad Mokhtar Al Azab, East Delta's head of international transportation as he watched the last bus drive off Monday.

"But we were interested in consolidating the peace process and providing service for our Palestinian brothers in the Israeli-occupied territory," Mr. Azab said.

The Israeli transport ministry has not given up on maintaining the Egypt-Israel bus link. The ministry accepted Egged's decision to stop running the unprofitable line, but will take bids from other companies to

restart service, spokesman Avner Ovadia said. There are no plans for Egypt to run the route alone.

Despite the inexpensive fare of \$25 one-way, there was only an average of 10 passengers on the 47-seat bus for each nine-hour trip. That figure increased to 30 during holidays.

The main clients were foreigners touring the region on shoe-string budgets. Of the seven passengers on board Monday, none were Egyptian, one was Israeli and the rest were foreign tourists. "I have no money and it is cheaper to go like this," said Jeff Craower,

from Montreal.

Israelis have been more likely to visit Egypt because incomes are higher in Israel, and so is the cost of vacationing, said Egged spokesman Ron Ratner.

"Israelis have money to spend, but Egyptians don't have money to travel," said Afifi Farag, an Egyptian bus driver who has worked the route since 1982.

There have been a number of terrorist attacks on Israelis in Egypt. One of the worst was an 1990 attack by two Palestinians gunmen on a tour group bus which left at nine Israelis dead and 20 wounded.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

14:05 Budgie (The Little Helicopter)
14:20 Captain Planet
14:40 Comedy — I Love Lucy
15:00 Sciences Cartoon
15:15 Magazine — Montaigne
16:00 At The Zoo
16:30 Dog House
17:00 News Flash
17:02 Fun With Physics
17:15 Drama — Cyclone Tracy
18:00 Serie — La Lumiere des Justes
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 Magazine — Extra Large
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 Murphy Brown
20:00 Magazine — Zero One
20:30 Film: "The Accidental Tourist"
22:00 News in English
22:25 Film: "Bert Rigby — You're a Fool"
23:59 The 1996 World Music Award

PRAYER TIMES

05:08 Fajr
06:30 (Sunrise) Duha
11:38 Dhuhir
14:23 'Asr
16:46 Maghreb
18:08 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweifeh, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church

Tel. 632785.

St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590

Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440.

De la Salle Church Tel. 661757.

Terra Sancta Church Tel. 622366

Anglican Church Tel. 652826.

Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771751.

Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261.

St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751.

Amman International Church Tel. 652526

Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 824328.

German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 845457

The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932.

Church of Nazareth Tel. 675691.

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295

English-speaking Latin Catholics Parish Tel. 614190.

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology
Temperatures are expected to rise with clouds appearing at dif-

ferent altitudes and winds south-easterly light to moderate. In

Aqaba, winds will be northerly moderate and seas calm.

Amman 04/18

Aqaba 10/24

Deserts 01/19

Jordan Valley 10/24

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 16, Aqaba 23 Humidity

readings: Amman 49 per cent.

Aqaba 35 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Bassam Karadshah 759200

Dr. Ramzi Mazzawi 894788

Dr. Khalid M'addi 661144

Dr. Abdul Wahab Awad 846070

Ferdows pharmacy 778336

Al Asema pharmacy 637055

Al Salam pharmacy 636730

Yacoub pharmacy 644945

Shmeisani pharmacy 637660

Nairoukh pharmacy 623672

Najib pharmacy 847632

IRBID:

Dr. Mazen Abu Bakir 276852

Al Quds pharmacy (—)

ZARQA:

Dr. Samir Al Lawzi 989601

Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111

Civil Defence Dept 661111

Civil Defence Immediate Resc-

ue 630341

Civil Defence Emergency 199

Rescue Police 192 621111.

637777

Fire Brigade 617101

Blood Bank 775121

Highway Police 843402

Traffic Police 896390

Public Security Department

..... 630321

Hotel Complaints 605800

Price Complaints 661176

Water and Sewerage Com-

plaints 897467

Amman Municipality Com-

plaints 787111

Telephone Information (direc-

tory assistance) 121

Overseas Calls 010230

Central Amman Telephone

Repairs 623101

Abdali Telephone Repairs

661101

Jordan Television 773111

Radio Jordan 774111

Water Authority 680100

Jordan Electricity Authority

..... 815615

Electric Power Company

636381

RJ Flight Information

0853200

Queen Alia Intl. Airport 08-

53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:

Hussein Medical Centre

813813/32

Khalidi Maternity 644281/6

Aldileh Maternity 642441/2

Jabal Amman Maternity

..... 642362

Malhas, J. Amman 636140

Palestine, Shmeisani 607071

Shmeisani Hospital 669131

The Islamic, Abdali 666128/37

Al-Ahli, Abdali 664164/6

Italian, Al-Muhajreen 777101/2

Al-Bashir 775111/15

Army, Marka 891611/15

Queen Alia Hospital

602240/50

Amal Hospital 674155

The Arab Centre for Heart

and Special Surgery 865199

ZARQA:

Zarqa Govt. Hospital (09)83323

Zarqa National Hospital

..... (09)900560

Ibn Sina Hospital, (09)986732

Al Hikma Modern Hospital

..... (09)990990

IRBID:

Princess Basma Hospital

..... (02)275555

Greek Catholic Hospital

..... (02)272275

Ibn Al Nafes Hospital

..... (02)247100

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA AIRPORT



HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, Monday honours Shuruq Samir Sahawneh with the King Hussein Gold Medal for outstanding physics research (Photo by Boghos)

Regent confers gold medal on student for physics research

AMMAN (Petra) — HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, Monday honoured a student from the Mafrag Governorate who won a physics research contest sponsored by the Polish Academy of Sciences.

During a special ceremony, held at his office in the Royal Court, the Crown Prince conferred the King Hussein Gold Medal for Distinction on Shuruq Samir Sahawneh from the Princess Rayu Bint Al Hussein school in Mafrag and presented her with a computer and a per-

manent subscription to the Internet.

In remarks encouraging Ms. Sahawneh to pursue her diligence and praising her instructor and place of education, the Regent urged her to participate in international physics research competitions.

She expressed her gratitude to Prince Hassan and stated that such an honour would provide further impetus to pursue her studies.

Ms. Sahawneh had previously won the Crown Prince Bronze Medal for youth activities.

The school director thanked Prince Hassan for a proffered laboratory, which he had sent as a gift to the school in 1987, and stated that the laboratory helped develop student talents and encouraged their research work.

The ceremony was attended by the student's family as well as Secretary General of the Higher Council of Science and Technology Hani Mulki and, the director of the Mafrag Department of Education.

Litigant testifies in national unity case

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A man, who filed a lawsuit against former Deputy Ahmad Owdi Abbadi and former editor of the weekly tabloid Shihan, Jihad Momani, accusing them of sowing societal divisions was Monday subjected to a two-hour grueling cross-examination by their defence team.

Litigant Ahmad Habboul, also an attorney, was asked by the defence as to whether he was Jordanian or Palestinian.

Mr. Habboul responded that he was a Jordanian of Palestinian origin and emphatically stated: "I am proud to be Jordanian."

Dr. Abbadi and Mr. Momani are being tried at the Amman Court of First Instance on charges of undermining national unity, inciting people to criminal acts and "felling bigotry" as regards to an interview with Dr. Abbadi in Shihan published June 29, 1996.

In August, the two men pleaded not guilty to the charges against them.

The defence attorneys also asked Mr. Habboul whether it was a duty to support or defend a severing of ties with the West Bank to which Mr. Habboul responded that he did not know.

The defence attorneys subsequently presented publications regarding the right of return for Palestinians and refugees and peace process agreements and

asked for his opinion concerning these publications. "I have no opinion about these publications because I did not read them," Mr. Habboul said.

The plaintiff charged in Monday's court session that remarks Dr. Abbadi had made in the Shihan interview were "racist and undermined national unity."

A statement from the interview, cited by Dr. Abbadi, read as follows: "There are several threats against Jordanian identity, both internal and external, as Jordan is menaced with becoming a substitute country for the Palestinians," and "Palestinians are not Jordanians under any circumstances."

Dr. Abbadi had previously testified, according to Mr. Habboul, that his remarks could not be considered as insulting Palestinians, and that what he meant was "a call for liberating Palestine and forming an independent Palestinian state in its own land."

Mr. Habboul told the Jordan Times that in next court session, he is planning to ask for a compensatory JD 1 million which, he said, he hopes to donate to establish a centre to fight regionalism in the Kingdom.

At the end of the two-hour court session, Judge Mahmoud Abbabneh, who is temporarily replacing Judge Tawfiq Quesi, postponed the case indefinitely.

Government maintains neutral stand in regards to Israeli trade exhibition

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The government is not a party to the convening of an Israeli trade exhibition in Amman and has no position on calls for boycotting the event, except that it is an individual right and choice to attend or decline. Minister of Information Marwan Muasher stated Monday.

At the same time, Dr. Muasher told a press briefing that "in my personal opinion it is a professional (journalist) duty to cover the exhibition as any other event in the country."

The minister was replying to a question on a call issued by the Jordan Press Association (JPA) to all journalists and press organisations not to cover the event but rather boycott it completely in what the JPA described as an expression of Israel's hardline positions and rejection of Arab rights.

The JPA call was the latest move in mounting opposition to the Israeli trade fair, which opens here Jan. 6. A self-styled "national committee for cancelling the Israeli trade fair" is leading the effort to foil the event.

"The government is not a party to the Israeli exhibition," Dr. Muasher told reporters, noting that the event was organised by a private sector organisation. At the same time, he said,

the government is bound to the provisions of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty of October 1994 which call for trade relations between the two countries.

As such, said the minister, the government has no objections to holding the Israeli exhibition just as any other event organised by a foreign country. The state-run media organisations, such as television and radio as well as the Jordan News Agency, Petra, will be covering the exhibition, Dr. Muasher affirmed.

Replying to a question regarding a threat by the "national committee for cancelling the Israeli trade fair" to physically prevent people from visiting the exhibition, Dr. Muasher noted that all citizens have the right to demonstrate "provided that they have the necessary permission from the relevant authorities."

"We are only concerned to ensure that any event (protest or demonstration) is legally permitted," said the minister, adding that as long as this condition was fulfilled the government did not intend to take any action.

Referring specifically to the JPA call, the minister said the government had no official position on the issue.

"It is the individual choice of every citizen to boycott or attend the event" and the government's policy is to

strictly respect that right, he said.

On the other hand, Dr. Muasher said, emphasising that he was expressing his personal opinion, boycotting any event, from the professional point of view of a field reporter, is not in line with his or her professional obligations.

Furthermore, he pointed out, how could a reporter fulfil his or her duty to inform the public by boycotting any event?

On the contrary, he said, a journalist will be in a much better position to assess the impact on the event and resultant political implications if any and relay them to the readers only if he or she actually covers the event.

The "national committee for cancelling the Israeli trade fair" which is headed by former Prime Minister Ahmad Obeidat, has threatened all those who participate in the exhibition with blacklisting.

The JPA has not spelled out what measures would be taken against JPA members who cover the exhibition. But a JPA board member Sunday affirmed that the association was not planning any punitive action against members who covered or attended the event.

WHAT'S GOING ON

EXHIBITIONS

* Products of the Jordan Design and Trade Centre of Noor Al Hussein Foundation at the Movenpick Hotel, Petra, until Jan. 10.

* "Special show and sale of Christmas crafts at the Jordan Crafts Centre (Alaydi), Jabal Amman, Second Circle (Tel. 644555), until Dec. 31.

* Christmas special at the Jordan River Designs showroom (hand-made ornaments and decoration), Jabal Amman, First Circle (Tel. 613081/2), until Dec. 31.

* Exhibition of colourful gifts and crafts designed by Andrea Atalla at the Jordan Design and Trade Centre of Noor Al Hussein Foundation, Wadi Saqra Street (Tel. 699141/2), until Jan. 10.

* Works by several artists entitled "The Artist and the Environment" by several artists at Alia Art Gallery, Jabal Amman, until Dec. 30.

* Works of small paintings by Jordanian and Arab artists at Baladna Art Gallery, Gardens St. (Tel. 687598), until Jan. 14.

* Works by Spanish painter Clara Amado at Instituto Cervantes, Jabal Amman until 15 Jan.

* Works by ten contemporary Indonesian artists entitled "From Scripts to Abstraction" at the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts (open daily except Tuesdays), until Jan. 12.

* Painting exhibition by Hind Nasser at the Jordan Arts and Crafts Centre/Arissana, Jabal Amman (Tel. 647858), until Jan. 10. Also displaying a regular exhibition of arts and crafts and Christmas items.

* Display of Christmas gift items at the Bani Humida House, Jabal Amman (Tel. 658696/7) until Jan. 2.

Produce to be marketed free of residual pesticides

AMMAN (J.T.) — The National Centre for Agricultural Research and Technology Transfer (NCARTT) Monday announced that agricultural products meeting new standards of safety and health will be offered for public consumption early next month.

The Jordan News Agency, Petra reported that, according to a NCARTT announcement, the produce, itself, is free of pesticide residues, caters to international standards and specifications and is produced by means of a new method employing very few pesticides.

"The products will be marketed only after tests ascertain that they are completely free of pesticide residues," the statement said.

The NCARTT has contacted hotels, restaurants and stores to inform them of the development.

The announcement also said that the new products were produced after lengthy research work on the part of the NCARTT in conjunction with the German Agency for Technical Cooperation.

Through the German agency, Jordan has received more than \$25 million worth of loans and

grants as well as technical assistance to promote agricultural extension services, management of water resources, pest removal, veterinary training and provision of consultancy services, the Ministry of Agriculture said.

Last week Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti told representatives of the Jordan Valley Farmers Association that Jordan is obliged to open new foreign markets for its products as well as to expand the existing markets by exporting high quality products.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Ministry of Health issues warning

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Ministry of Health has urged all media not to advertise or promote food products for infants to be used during the weaning period, before the given product is registered at the ministry. As a rule, the statement noted, any advertising for infant milk is banned in Jordan.

Kabariti visits Ministry of Administrative Development

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti Monday visited the Ministry of Administrative Development where he was briefed by Minister Kamal Nasser on progress in increasing the efficiency of government institutions.

'Asbestos lining linked to illness in Wadi Mousa'

By Tanya Habbouja
and Tarek Atalla
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Asbestos lining in a Wadi Mousa school has been linked to illness and health hazards, yet due to lack of funds and land area, a new school building is not likely to be constructed soon.

The problem came to light when a voluntary society of doctors offered one free day of medical treatment to Wadi Mousa residents on Dec. 20 and encountered a high rate of illness from one school in particular — the Wadi Mousa Secondary School for Girls.

Volunteer Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist Hassan Badran examined 30 cases of severe allergies in students and teachers, "which is a high number for one

school building," he affirmed.

According to Director of the Wadi Mousa Youth Centre Asma Tuqvisi, 35 teachers, who have worked in this school building, have also suffered miscarriages.

Physicians have also attributed the high rate of illness to the building's asbestos insulation, a substance which is no longer allowed in the United States due to associated health hazards.

Asbestos was once popular due to its fire and heat repellence but began to fall under suspicion in the early seventies when doctors began to note serious health menaces, such as asbestosis, a respiratory disease caused by inhaling asbestos fibres, which hardens lungs and also lung cancer and other various allergic reac-

tions.

Head of Education for the Ma'an Schools Mizel Soodi told the Jordan Times Saturday that officials from the Ministry of Education have visited the school four times and sent a group of engineers to appraise the situation.

"The engineers have pledged to renovate certain parts but due to lack of land and funds we are currently unable to construct a new building," he said.

"The students claim that a certain smell has precipitated fainting spells and this can be attributed to leakage under the plastic floors onto rockwool insulation material and they will fix this next year," said Mr. Soodi.

"We have already begun renovations, and placed glass in the windows to keep out the cold," he said.

When asked if he was

aware of the health risks posed by the asbestos lining, Mr. Soodi admitted little knowledge of its effects, "but the Ministry of Health did mention asbestos cancer risks four years ago," he stated.

Officials at the Ministry of Health were unavailable for comment on Sunday.

According to Mr. Soodi, some buildings were donated from the Canadian government years ago, including this one, and they are still structurally safe.

"Let them bring scientific proof that this school building has caused allergies and miscarriages, there are other schools with a similar structure, why have they not complained?" he asked.

"Further investigation is necessary and the ministry should send allergists to carry out a skin scratch test," Dr. Badran told a

reporter Sunday.

"Based on our treatment of these patients, we have established statistical evidence that there is an allergic reaction in this school building and since there is asbestos, one must assume that it is the cause of the problem," concluded Dr. Badran.

President of the Jordanian Association of Health Culture (JAHC) Zuhair Abu Ferris, who is also a gynaecologist, declared "asbestos is not healthy in this school — not for the women nor for the children."

Renovations will continue, but as for a new school building the answer remains to be seen and a debate appears to be unfolding.

Due to moving to its permanent premises, at 47 Maysaloun Street - Rabiya, the Israeli Embassy will be closed on Wednesday and Thursday, 1-2/1/1997. The Embassy will resume its operations in its new premises on Sunday 5/1/1997.

The Embassy's new phone numbers will be:

5524680-8.

P.O. Box 950866, Amman 11195

The Consulate will reopen and resume its work in the new premises on Sunday 5/1/1997:

Office hours: Sunday till Thursday, from 09:00 till 13:00 hrs.

The Consulate's new phone numbers will be:

5525170-5

Yugoslav opposition plans New Year festival of protests

BELGRADE (R) — Serbia's pro-democracy movement planned a New Year's Eve extravaganza of rallies and parties with alarm clocks set to ring at midnight, as if time were running out for President Slobodan Milosevic.

Emboldened by Western solidarity, demonstrators protesting at election fraud girded to hit the streets in the Yugoslav capital Belgrade and other towns Monday for the 43rd consecutive day.

The protest wave, enduring in the teeth of police moves to drive demonstrators off busy streets, is the most sustained popular push for democratisation in 50 years of leftist one-party rule in Serbian-led Yugoslavia.

Up to a quarter of a million people have rallied daily in Serbia against Mr. Milosevic's annulment of Nov. 17 municipal elections in urban districts, including Belgrade, won by the opposition Zajedno (Together) Coalition.

The ruling Socialists (SPS) blamed unspecified "irregularities" in the vote. But Zajedno, supported later by findings of a special OSCE mission, accused the SPS of blatant vote fraud and demanded that its victories be reinstated.

Zajedno prepared a street spectacle for Tuesday, New Year's Eve, to keep up the enthusiasm of supporters whose ranks have dwindled since subzero, snowy weather set in a week ago.

A costume ball for children was scheduled followed by a midtown procession in mid-evening and then a huge party in Republic Square with well-known pop music groups and actors.

Zajedno said "tickets" for the party would consist of candles, sparklers or alarm clocks timed to go off at the stroke of 12 in a humorous warning to strongman Milosevic.

Zajedno received a potentially important expression of support in a letter from what appeared to be dissident officers in the Yugoslav army (VJ).

The group warned Mr. Milosevic in the letter, read out before 50,000 Zajedno activists in Belgrade Sunday, that they would refuse to fire on demonstrators if ordered to do so.

The letter was addressed to Mr. Milosevic, VJ commander General Momilo Perisic and pro-democracy university students in Nis, Serbia's second largest city, but not to

Zajedno.

The message included a warning that the opposition would be toppled in its turn if it became autocratic in power. The officers' letter was unsigned and unauthenticated and there was no indication of the number of VJ officers involved.

But it suggested that any move by Mr. Milosevic to declare a state of emergency would either fail or pit the army against his security police force.

The army helped Mr. Milosevic crush demonstrations in 1991, but has remained neutral during his conflict with Zajedno.

"We will not allow Serbia to go under, we shall never act against our own people," the letter read. "If necessary, we shall place ourselves at the head of the Serbian people in the final victory of truth."

Gen. Perisic pledged during a meeting with Yugoslav Federal President Zoran Lilic Monday to maintain stability in the country, the official news agency Tanjug said, without mentioning the reported officers' letter.

Quoting Mr. Lilic's office, Tanjug said Gen. Perisic had vowed that the army would "continue to contribute significantly to ensuring the stability and safeguarding the integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia."

Serbian police have been enforcing a ban on street marches since a Dec. 24 riot involving Zajedno protesters and government loyalists bused into Belgrade from the provinces to champion the beleaguered Milosevic.

Belgrade students distributed leaflets Monday claiming that the capital was "occupied" by police and urging citizens to join them in a parade of cars. "The police are not letting us march so we shall drive," the leaflet said.

Mr. Milosevic, who last week proclaimed to pro-government counter-demonstrators that Serbia's fate would not be sealed by "a foreign hand," is mulling a response to last week's critical report by a delegation from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Western governments have warned Mr. Milosevic he can forget about financial aid for Yugoslavia's wrecked economy unless he concedes electoral defeats and starts broad democratic reform.

China says cold war lives

BEIJING (R) — China warned Monday against reinforcing military alliances, saying cold war ideology lived on.

In an apparent dig at the United States, it also hailed what it called a trend towards a multi-polar political and economic world order.

"The practice of reinforcing military alliances runs counter to the current tide of peace and development, and will have to arouse great concern among the people," Vice-Premier Qian Qichen was quoted by the official Xinhua News Agency as saying.

"The cold war has ended but confrontational 'cold war thinking' still exists," said Mr. Qian, who is also foreign minister.

Mr. Qian did not name specific targets for Beijing's ire but the remarks closely followed a visit by Premier Li Peng to Russia, a trip that prompted China's official news media to trumpet the rise of a power centre to balance the United States.

Chinese political analysts have noted they shared Russian concerns over the

planned expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to admit Moscow's former cold war allies in Eastern Europe.

China has also vented its anger at closer U.S. military ties with Japan stemming from an agreement this year that enhanced security ties between the two countries.

Beijing has tried to strengthen its own links with the United States and other Western countries, but it is keen to see some check on Washington's power, diplomats said.

Mr. Qian said a key trend of the past year was the movement towards economic and political "multipolarisation."

Relations between the world's big powers were undergoing major readjustments, marked by mutual reliance and restraint, which have brought about a complicated and changeable situation, he said.

This was underscored by widespread opposition to the Helms-Burton and D'Aramo legislation put into effect by the United States with the aim of tightening economic sanctions against

Cuba and Iran, he said.

The two laws had been strongly condemned and extensively boycotted, Mr. Qian said.

China sees these laws as U.S. interference in the affairs of other states, a sensitive subject for a country that has come under sharp criticism for its human rights policies at home.

Mr. Qian said that over the last year, Beijing had moved to counter practices that interfered in its internal affairs, safeguarding the state's sovereignty, territorial integrity and national dignity.

Beijing was willing to work with the United States to improve ties, adding that relations had stabilised after a "period of turbulence" earlier this year.

Sino-U.S. relations were badly strained by Beijing's war games and missile tests near Taiwan in March.

Relations between Washington and Beijing were also marred by tensions over trade, human rights and arms proliferation although a series of meetings between senior officials helped to ease strains in recent months.

China offers reward, scours city for Tibet bomber

BEIJING (R) — China has launched a manhunt across the restive region of Tibet, tightened airport security and offered a reward of \$120,000 for the arrest of culprits who exploded a bomb in Lhasa last week, officials said Monday.

The government had announced a reward of one million yuan (\$120,000) for information leading to the arrest of those responsible for the bomb blast early on Christmas Day outside city government offices in the Tibetan capital, Lhasa, a senior official said.

"No one has yet been arrested and we are now mobilising and deploying our forces," Lhasa Vice Mayor Ou Yangxiang said in a telephone interview.

Notice of the reward had been published in the Lhasa Evening News on Dec. 27 and it was being issued in other newspapers in the strategic Himalayan region, government officials said.

The Christmas Day bomb, the largest so far set off by anti-Chinese activists in restive Tibet, had resulted in no casualties but caused widespread damage, shattering windows within a radius of 100 metres, officials said.

"Almost the whole of Lhasa heard it," said one Lhasa government official. "It was a muffled sound, like 'whoong'."

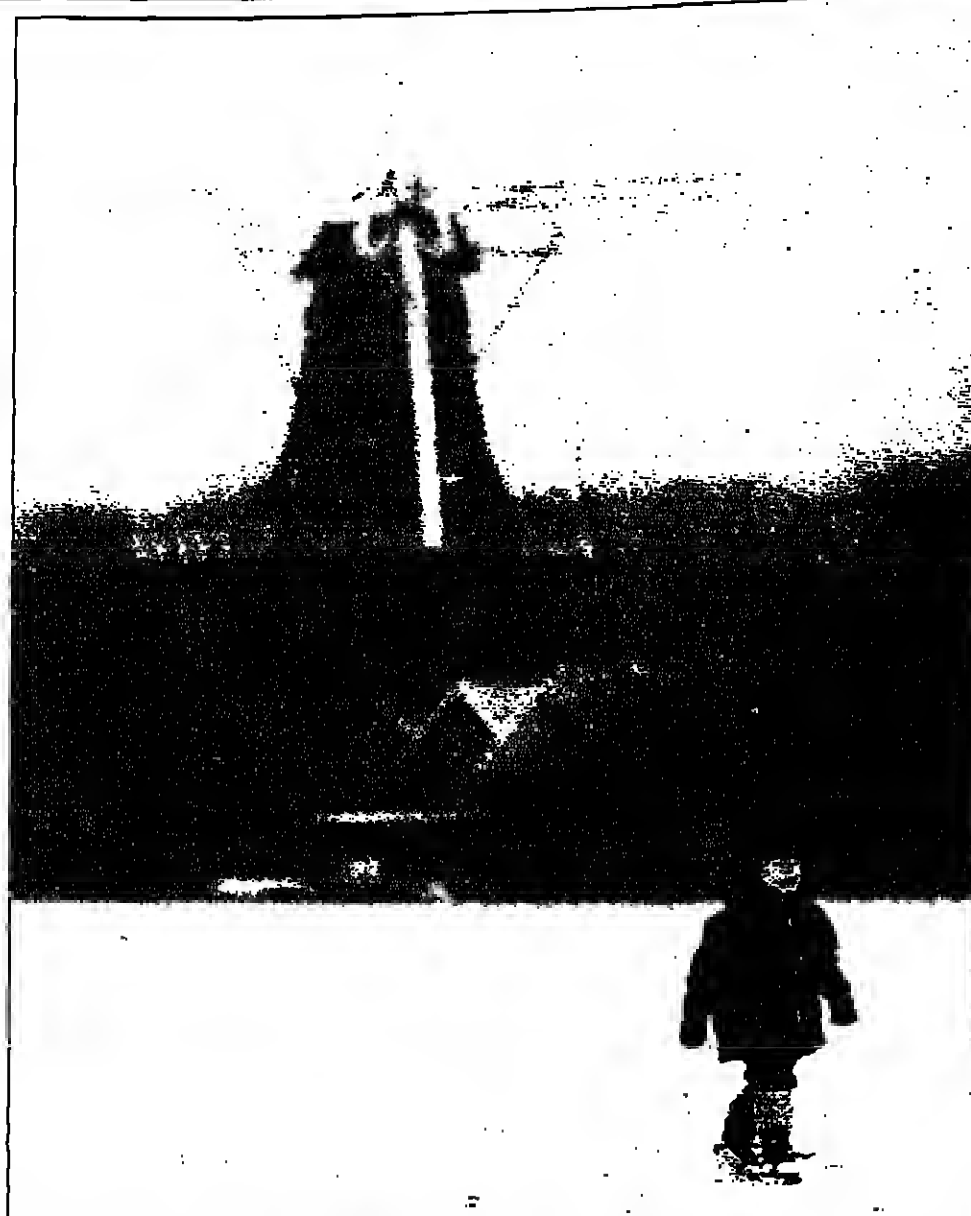
Officials insisted there was little doubt that the blast was politically motivated and carried out by followers of the region's exiled god-king, the Dalai Lama.

The bomb exploded at night outside a government building and was therefore clearly political, said Zhou Kaifu, deputy director of the Tibet Public Security Bureau.

"This was done by the Dalai separatist camp," the government official said, adding that the attack bore the hallmarks of previous similar "terrorist acts." He declined to give details although several smaller bombings have been reported in Lhasa.

"This is a terrorist act, aimed at destroying peace in our area," he said. "This was a brazen act."

Police had set up a special task force to search for the culprits and customs and immigration officials had stepped up security searches at Tibet's airport, he said.



A young boy enjoys his first skating steps with a windmill in the background on a lake in Rotterdam Sunday. The Dutch are taking advantage of temperatures dropping below zero by skating on the natural ice. Weather forecasters have predicted that the cold spell will last into next week (Reuter photo)

Arctic weather leaves over 80 dead in Europe, causes chaos

Agence France Presse

ARCTIC-STYLE weather kept Europe in deep freeze Monday as ice, snow and the lowest temperatures in decades raised the death toll to over 80 and caused chaos on roads across the continent.

Deaths due to the freak cold snap have been reported in virtually every country in Europe, from Russia and Georgia in the east to Spain in the west, with the homeless and elderly inevitably the hardest hit.

While many people took advantage of the conditions to indulge in a spot of post-Christmas exercise on skates or skis, others battled the cold, snow and ice simply to stay alive.

In France, three more people were found dead over the weekend, bringing the overall toll to 10 in a week. A man aged 74 died in his car near the north coast, a blind man of 72 collapsed during his daily walk in the south, while a 63-year-old retired farmer perished walking to his home in central France.

In Germany, two men aged 59 and 53 died of cold in the eastern Brandenburg state, where heavy snowfalls also caused chaos on the roads.

A woman of 51 died while out for a walk from her home in Vienna, bringing the death toll in Austria to four since Wednesday, Tem-

peratures have dropped to as low as minus 25 Celsius (minus 13 Fahrenheit).

Three people died in Spain over the weekend in the first deaths caused by the appalling weather this year. An 18-year-old girl fell into heavy seas off the northeast coast, and her father plunged in after her. Both drowned.

In Valencia, on the Mediterranean coast, a homeless man died in the hut he was sheltering in.

Temperatures earlier plunged to 30-year lows in France and 10-year lows in Poland where a further six frozen corpses were discovered over the weekend to bring the total death toll there to 16.

Moldova recorded its coldest day since 1946 with minus 27 Celsius (minus 17 Fahrenheit).

In Britain, a 50-year-old couple drowned at Grays, near London, when they plunged into a lake to try to save their Labrador dog. It swam to safety.

Romania's Premier Victor Ciorbea appealed for help for the homeless after at least 20 died from the cold, and a man and a woman were found dead in the Czech Republic after venturing out.

In Turkey, six children died when an avalanche swept down the slopes at the Palandoken Ski Resort, and two people died in an avalanche in northern

Georgia. It was not all doom and gloom however. In Paris, where the thermometer hit a 34-year low, people slipped on their skates near the Eiffel Tower.

In Poland, a young couple ignored a temperature of minus 20 Celsius (minus four Fahrenheit) to get married in a balloon as they overflew their home town of Koszalin in the north.

"Only the slightly shaky signatures on the marriage certificate demonstrate the unusual circumstances of the ceremony," the town's Mayor Jerzy Litwin, who officiated the wedding, said.

Freak snowfalls led to road traffic chaos, cut power transmission lines and caused a supermarket roof to collapse on the Mediterranean island of Corsica.

Snow fell on Rome and other parts of central Italy, cutting off isolated villages, closing motorways and snarling up airport traffic.

Some 300 people were freed from a tunnel in the Caucasus mountains in North Ossetia after rescuers worked for three days to clear an avalanche that blocked roads.

Temperatures in Austria, France and Spain rose slightly Monday with the onset of light snow showers. In southern Spain, heavy rains caused widespread damage, particularly to olive groves, and blocked some 45 roads.

Another powerful storm slams western U.S.

SAN FRANCISCO (R) — A fierce storm pounded the Pacific northwest Sunday, dumping heavy rain, ice and snow on a region still reeling from last week's punishing cold front.

Washington Governor Mike Lowry declared a state of emergency in 11 counties, citing widespread destruction from freezing rain, snow and flooding. He also activated the Washington National Guard to help residents in hard-hit areas.

Power was cut to the Portland International Airport for a second time Sunday during the holiday rush, causing dozens of flight delays, schedule changes and cancellations. Thousands of travelers have been stranded at the airport.

"It impacted a lot of people trying to leave Portland," airport spokesman Darrel Butrice said. "It's going to take a considerable number of hours before it's back to normal."

For motorists, travel was restricted on several major roadways in Oregon and Washington state due to snow and ice.

Flood and storm warnings were issued from northern California, where more than 10 inches (25 cm) of rainfall was expected, to northern Washington, where 10 inches (25 cm) or more of new snow was in the forecast.

The storm has knocked out power to tens of thousands in Washington, Oregon and California, and has set back efforts to restore electricity to homes and businesses that were cut off by the ice and snowstorm that struck on Thursday and Friday.

Puget Sound Power and Light Co., which services nine counties in western Washington said 107,000 of its customers were now without power.

"It's beginning to climb back up," said Puget Power spokeswoman Kristen Wappler. "These are extreme conditions. There could be many new outages."

Washington's emergency proclamation covered Clallam, King, Kitsap, Mason, Island, Pierce, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, Thurston and Whatcom counties.

Downtown Seattle was virtually shut down by the storm. Some people used snowmobiles to get around the city and snow was piled in drifts several feet (a few metres) deep. By Sunday night, northern Washington could receive three to 10 inches (eight to 25 cm) of new snow, while eight to 12 inches (20 to 30 cm) were forecast for the cascades.

A flood watch was declared for southwest Washington and the Olympic peninsula. State transportation officials urged motorists to stay off the roads due to treacherous conditions.

"It's certainly one of the worst ice storms that a lot of folks have seen and the worst snowstorm that people remember," Mark Clemens of Washington's Emergency Management Division said. "If you don't have to go out, don't."

Survey offers hope for Major

LONDON (R) — Many Britons are optimistic 1997 will bring them better fortune, offering a glimmer of hope to Prime Minister John Major's beleaguered Conservative government, according to a survey published Monday.

The Daily Telegraph said the traditional end-of-year poll by the Gallup Organisation showed 37 per cent of Britons expected 1997 to be better than this year, while just 21 per cent feared a turn for the worse. The rest believed it would be no different or failed to answer.

The Telegraph said the findings, culled in interviews of 949 adults across the country between Dec. 12 and 17, brought some hope to Mr. Major.

The Conservatives, facing a general election in less than five months, have been 20 points or more behind the opposition Labour Party in opinion polls.

In the past, surveys such as the one carried out by Gallup had proved "surprisingly accurate" as predictors of the election victor, said the Telegraph, traditionally loyal to the Conservatives.

When voters were optimistic the government tended to stay in power and when voters were pessimistic the opposition won — a rule which had held true in seven out of the last nine elections.

This time the gap between optimists and pessimists —

16 points — was as large as when Mr. Major won the last election in 1992, despite early opinion polls in Labour's favour.

But the Telegraph said at least one of the exceptions to the rule was ominous for Mr. Major. In 1964, Labour ousted the Conservatives after 13 years in power despite optimists outnumbering pessimists by 23 points.

Optimism was probably so pervasive in 1964 that voters felt confident of the future whichever party took office, said the newspaper. Meanwhile Mr. Major pledged Sunday to fight — and win — the looming election on the basis of a booming economy.

Setting the tone for the forthcoming election campaign, Mr. Major said Britain faced a watershed year in 1997.

"They can choose a future where prices and mortgage rates are firmly under control," Mr. Major said in a new year message to the chairman of Local Conservative Party Associations.

"They can choose a future that looks rosy, with the best economic conditions this country has seen for a century...and they can choose a future where British interests will be fought for in Europe."

"Or they can risk a future with an untried, unrealistic alternative. We will win that election, because on all three counts it is too risky to trust Labour with Britain's

future," he said in the letter, released by the ruling party Sunday.

Mr. Major also made five pledges to voters.

He promised to cut the basic rate of tax from 23 per cent to 20, to keep inflation firmly under control, to ensure house loans remain affordable, to create new jobs and to fight against moves towards a more federal Europe.

But the opposition Labour Party, which has a poll lead of 20 points or more with an election due by May at the latest, immediately dismissed Mr. Major's rallying cry to key party workers.

"It is a desperate last-ditch effort to win back support before the election," said Labour's deputy leader John Prescott.

"It will fail like every attempt before because the British people want fresh, strong leadership for the future, not the same old personal abuse from the Tories and the same old lies about their record," said Mr. Prescott.

Labour leader Tony Blair unveiled five pledges three months ago at his party's last annual conference before the election.

Mr. Blair promised to cut primary school class sizes, to get 250,000 unemployed youths into work, to take a tough line on persistent young offenders and to keep both government spending and inflation down.



Guerrilla Commander Rolando Moran lights an eternal flame in front of the National Palace after a peace treaty was signed by the Guatemalan government and leftist rebels Sunday. Guatemalan President Alvaro Arzu stands at left with Sylvia, a girl who was permanently injured and lost her family to the war (Reuter photo)

Guatemala ends 36 years of civil war

GUATEMALA CITY (AFP) — Thirty-six years of civil war in Guatemala formally drew to a close with the signing of a historic peace accord Sunday ending Central America's longest-running conflict.

Jubilant demonstrations in the capital and around the nation greeted the signing of the pact which took place at 5:41 p.m. (23:41 GMT) Sunday in a ceremony at the National Palace by President Alvaro Arzu and leaders of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG).

"Today is the moment of peace for Guatemala, today we have made concrete part of our mission and our promise and have reaffirmed our commitment to the future of our people and our region," Mr. Arzu said.

The treaty, which includes 10 "separate" agreements along with a "firm and lasting peace accord," ends the region's longest conflict, which began in November 1960 and left an estimated 150,000 people dead and some 40,000 missing.

Ahead of the ceremony, the capital saw its biggest street demonstrations since the democratic revolution in 1944.

More than 10,000 people began celebrations prior to the treaty signing by spending all night outdoors, singing and dancing in the capital's downtown area.

Radio announcers broadcasting live from the square repeatedly remarked that they had never seen such crowds in the streets, which were adorned with large banners, most of them covered with leftist slogans.

The public celebration began with the arrival in the square of hundreds of indigenous people from Guatemala's interior, wearing brightly coloured outfits and sandals, who then danced around a 30-metre pole.

Some 20,000 people took part in a march in the capital in memory of the victims of the bloody civil war.

Their three-kilometre walk, dubbed the "march for martyrs," took them to the general cemetery and Guatemala City's Constitution Square.

Most of the march leaders gathered around the tomb of former President Jacobo Arbenz, whose remains were repatriated from El Salvador in October 1995.

The marchers clapped their hands for a minute in memory of the dead, applause that "resonated throughout my soul" and "could be heard throughout the country," said Juan Coc, one of those celebrating.

The agreement is the fruit of five years of negotiations. The government and the URNG signed a ceasefire in Oslo Dec. 4 and another agreement on Dec. 7 in Stockholm on constitutional reforms.

The URNG delegation was composed of leftist rebel commanders Rolando Moran, Carlos Gonzalez and Pablo Monsanto, leaders of their respective movements, and Jose Rosal, representing his group's leader, Gaspar Ilom.

"The accords are irreversible, and we are happy because the armed conflict is over," said Rolando Castillo, known as Commandante Anibal of the Revolutionary Army of the People, one of the guerrilla groups.

Enrique Corral, a member of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor, said the former rebels hope to form an important political force for elections set for 1999.

"This will not be easy, because our society is polarised, but progressive forces should join together in the URNG," he said.

Among the heads of state and government attending were Presidents Jose Maria Figueres of Costa Rica, Ernesto Samper of Colombia, Carlos Roberto Reina of Honduras, Armando Calderon Sol of El Salvador, Violeta Chamorro of Nicaragua, Rafael Caldera of Venezuela and Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico, along with Prime Ministers Jose Maria Aznar of Spain and Goran Persson of Sweden.

Outgoing U.N. Secretary General Boutros Ghali and Organisation of American States Secretary General Cesar Gaviria were also present, as was U.N. mediator Jean Arnault, who signed the treaty.

Under the terms of the accord, the URNG will become a political party. The text also recognises the "inalienable right" of Guatemalan society to discover the truth about violations of human rights.

International organisations will give the fledgling party some \$105 million. The Inter-American Development Bank was expected to sign agreements Monday for some \$92.3 million in social and community development programmes.

At least 43 reported killed in weekend violence in Algeria

ALGIERS (AFP) — The reported killing of eight villagers in a bomb attack at Zeddine, southwest of Algiers, brought to at least 43 the reported death toll in one of Algeria's worst weekends of violence in recent months.

The bloodshed comes two weeks ahead of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, a period considered auspicious for jihad or holy war.

The Armed Islamic Group (GIA), the military wing of the now-banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), is suspected of being behind several massacres in the last two months, mainly in the area around Algiers, that have left nearly 200 dead.

Islamic extremists took up arms against the military-backed regime in 1992 after the cancellation of elections the FIS was poised to win.

The villagers in Zeddine, near Ain Delfa, 150 kilometres southwest of Algiers, were killed when they were riding in a tractor-trailer they were driving over a bomb thrown by an armed group, the Liberie daily reported Monday.

In the same area, 28 people — 34 according to the daily Le Matin — were slaughtered in the towns of Dhamnia and Ellouz in overnight raids Saturday on the orders of GIA chief Antar Zouabri, according to Le Matin.

Liberie said the victims, men and women of all ages, were hacked and mutilated after being shot.

The assailants were then engaged by security forces in a clash that left two militants dead.

Early Sunday, 10 lemonade plant workers were seriously injured in Kolea, 40 kilometres west of Algiers, when their transport drove over a bomb, the El Watan daily reported Monday.

Two of the injured in the incident Sunday were in "very serious" condition in hospital, the paper said.

The same day a bomb at a cafe in the eastern Algiers suburb of El Harrach left between one and three dead and up to 54 injured, press reports said after authorities announced an official toll of 20 injured.

The explosive device, made of plastic according to Liberie, had been placed in a nylon bag and left in the cafe by two young men, according to El Watan.

Five bomb and car bomb attacks in Algiers and surrounding areas have left a further more than 15 dead and at least 200 injured over the past week in the runup to Ramadan, beginning around Jan. 10 depending on the exact position of the moon.

An intensification in violence by Muslim fundamentalists in the days leading up to Ramadan has been a feature of the Algerian calendar since the start of the conflict in early 1992.

More than 200 civilians have been killed since Nov. 1 in attacks blamed on armed Islamic militants, according to figures compiled from official communiques, witnesses and press reports. The authorities have made terse announcements of the killings, usually with lower death tolls than those reported in the press, and without comment.

Rezzag Bara, the head of Algeria's official human rights watchdog, the National Human Rights Observatory, said Sunday that "acts of terrorism and sabotage still threaten public safety but are no longer a danger to the country's stability."

Mr. Bara was quoted by the official Algerian News Agency (APS) as saying that Algeria's human rights situation had improved significantly in recent years but that "certain constraints remain because of the need to safeguard the security of people and their belongings."

A month ago Mr. Bara criticised a report by Amnesty International depicting the human rights situation in Algeria since the state of emergency was imposed in 1992.

The conflict has claimed more than 50,000 lives in five years, according to Western tallies.

Yeltsin: Chechenya peace was 1996 highlight

MOSCOW (R) — Russian President Boris Yeltsin said Monday that peace in the Chechenya region of the Caucasus was one of the most important events of the past year.

"I cannot state that the evil circle of intolerance and hatred has been broken everywhere and fully," Mr. Yeltsin said in an end-of-the-year interview with three Russian news agencies.

"The course for peace often suffers heavy blows. But I will pursue it unwaveringly. This is the course of the president."

Mr. Yeltsin sent troops into the North Caucasus region in December 1994 to quell its independence drive.

The troops suffered a series of humiliations at the hands of lightly armed but determined Chechen guerrillas in 21 months of bloody fighting.

Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have been killed, many made homeless, Mr. Yeltsin has said the decision to use military force in Chechenya may have been his biggest mistake in political life.

Mr. Yeltsin said in the interview that 1996 had been a difficult year for him.

The president, who returned to his Kremlin desk a week ago after a heart bypass operation on Nov. 5, added: "Now I am ready to tackle the most complicated problems facing Russia... I should make up for the lost time."

Afghan frontline comes under heavy shelling; jet bombs Qarabagh

QARABAGH, Afghanistan (AFP) — An anti-Taliban jet dropped four bombs Monday on this town north of Kabul captured by the Taliban Islamic militia last week as the frontlines came under heavy artillery fire, witnesses said.

A Sukhoi SU-22 bomber dropped two pairs of high-explosive bombs on the western side of the bazaar, but no casualties were reported as the bazaar was mostly deserted.

The Taliban militia, which captured Qarabagh in a lightning attack Friday, have dug-in a few kilometres north of the town where their frontlines also came under heavy artillery fire.

Several tanks and armoured fighting vehicles went forward to reinforce the Taliban lines, and more waited in reserve in Qarabagh bazaar.

"There was an infantry attack last night against us, but we gave up no ground," said Taliban returning from the frontline.

They said there was a two-hour attack by the coalition forces of ex-government troops under Commander Ahmad Shah Masood, now in alliance with the ethnic Uzbek forces of northern warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum and the minority Shi'ite religious sect under Karim Khalili.

The squad of Taliban fighters admitted they were ex-Mujahideen from the Hezb-i-Islami faction of former Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyari, who along with President Burhanuddin Rabbani, fled Kabul when it fell to the Taliban on Sept. 27.

The Taleban fighters were driving to Kabul for a rest period. They said they had to serve seven nights on the frontline before taking a week's recreation.

Some locals were seen leaving the town. "We are leaving because it is not safe for us here," one old man told AFP in Qarabagh, 45 kilometres north of Kabul.

Tu the rear of Qarabagh Taleban heavy weapons, both multi-barrel rocket launchers and 122mm Howitzers hammered the opposing side with salvos of artillery-fire.

Of the 18 dead bodies of anti-Taliban soldiers counted by AFP on the road south of Qarabagh last Saturday, only two remained Monday. Bloodstains and abandoned uniforms however marked where the others were killed.

The Taleban are still a few kilometres short of a strategic intersection where the so-called old road — which runs from Kabul to Qarabagh and farther north into rival faction territory — joins with the new road coming from Bagram Air Base to the east.

Bagram Air Base, 50 kilometres north of Kabul, is still in the hands of the three-party anti-Taliban alliance, but the Taleban have advanced from the south along the new road to within a few kilometres of the base which is under artillery fire.

If this intersection falls to the Taleban — and they expressed determination to take it — the way north to the Parwan provincial capital Charikar would be open, as would a second front against Bagram.

N. Korea blasts Seoul as submarine dead returned

PANMUNJOM, South Korea (R) — North Korean loudspeakers blasted "butchers" and "colonial pawns" in South Korea as boxes holding ashes of 24 Northern submarine intruders were handed back in boxes across the border Monday.

The ceremony was intended as a gesture of conciliation by South Korea a day after Pyongyang issued a brief apology for the infiltration by one of its Shark-class submarines in September.

Tied to white cotton bundles with black identification markings, the boxes were handed over one at a time by a 12-member honour guard from the U.S.-led United Nations Command at the border town of Panmunjom.

After troops from the North Korean People's Army had laid the ashes in wooden coffins, voices booming from loudspeakers on the Northern side of the border praised the intruders as "martyrs that fought like heroes."

In stark contrast to the tone of Sunday's apology — an unprecedented statement of contrition by North Korea expressing "deep regret" — the voices, in Korean, delivered blistering attacks on the Seoul government.

"This incident revealed that the South Korean regime consists of human butchers and colonial pawns," one said. "The soldiers were on a regular training mission and the South Koreans murdered them."

The handover was arranged by the U.N. Command, which monitors a ceasefire that ended the 1950-53 Korean War.

Of 26 North Koreans that landed from the vessel, 11 were found shot dead — apparently in a mass suicide — and 13 were killed by Southern forces during a massive manhunt. One was captured alive and one is still at large.

Seoul has said it will return the captured agent or the submarine, as Pyongyang has demanded.

Seoul swiftly agreed to send home the remains after Pyongyang's apology, which was hailed as move towards peace by U.S. President Bill Clinton.

In its apology, North Korea promised not to repeat such incidents and pledged to work for "durable peace and stability on the Korean peninsula."

The apology was issued by the Korean Central News Agency after a series of items attacking South Korean President Kim Young-Sam as a "ruthless tyrant," "puppet" and "traitor."

"I am pleased that Pyongyang has pledged to prevent the recurrence of such an incident and has expressed its willingness to work with others for durable peace and stability on the peninsula," Mr. Clinton said in a written statement.

"I hope discussions can now begin to move forward on the four-party peace talks which President Kim Young-Sam and I offered last April."

Mr. Clinton and President Kim invited North Korea and China to take part in talks aimed at securing a lasting peace to replace the truce that ended the Korean War.

But independent analysts in Seoul said they were sceptical about whether Pyongyang was ready for face-to-face negotiations with South Korea.

Some said the level of North Korean propaganda attacks on South Korea, which infuriate the Seoul government, would be a good indication of Pyongyang's true intentions.

The submarine incursion put on ice the peace initiative, froze international food aid to the hungry North and stalled implementation of a nuclear agreement under which Pyongyang pledged to halt its nuclear weapons programme.

Pyongyang's apology was issued after U.S. and North Korean officials hammered out acceptable wording during intense negotiating sessions in New York.

China welcomed the apology and said it hoped for further relaxation in the New Year. But it stopped short of a direct response to the invitation to join peace talks.

"China welcomes efforts made by the parties concerned to remove as early as possible the effects of the submarine incident on the Korean peninsula and to improve their mutual relations and maintain peace and stability of the peninsula," Foreign Ministry spokesman Shen Guoliang said.

Meanwhile, The United States has pledged to ease a trade embargo against North Korea and give food aid to the flood-ravaged Communist state, Pyongyang's official news agency said Monday.

Washington struck the deals during talks in New York between officials from the United States and North Korea from Dec. 9 to 29, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

"The U.S. side promised that it would take additional measures to ease the embargo on the DPRK (North Korea) and supply food to the DPRK," KCNA said in a dispatch monitored in Tokyo. It gave no details.

Korean subway drivers back down, unions fight on

SEOUL (R) — Striking South Korean subway drivers and nurses began drifting back to work Monday, but labour union leaders said it was only a temporary retreat and vowed to escalate industrial action in the new year.

Shipyards and car plants remained idle, and the Central Bank figures showed strikes that have swept the country since Thursday were hitting exports.

"We will take our strikes to a higher level and prolong them starting in the New Year," said Kwon Young-Kil, head of the outlawed Korean Confederation of Trade Unions.

The much larger Federation of Korean Trade Unions, which called its 1.2 million members out on strike until the end of the year, said it would announce details Tuesday on an escalated second stage which would include the public sector.

Striking subway drivers in Seoul and South Korea's second-highest city, Pusan, returned to their posts Monday after a short strike failed to disrupt services.

Non-union workers had kept trains moving.

Subway unions are discussing a renewed strike in January, and the Seoul Metropolitan Rapid Transit, which runs three new lines in Seoul, has already declared a 48-hour strike starting Saturday.

Hospital unions decided to suspend their action Tuesday, although some nurses and orderlies began returning to their wards Sunday and more joined them Monday.

Hong Kong's 1997 legislature to meet in China

HONG KONG (R) — Hong Kong's leader-designate Tung Chee-Hwa said Monday the Beijing-appointed legislature set up to replace the elected Legislative Council in mid-1997 would hold its first sitting soon, in China rather than Hong Kong.

Mr. Tung was speaking after his first informal meeting with the post-colonial deputies who will take over lawmaking in Hong Kong when Britain hands back the territory at midnight next June 30.

With only 183 days left until the handover, Mr. Tung is moving quickly to assemble a cabinet and to hammer out his relationship with the provisional chamber, which he said would hold its first official session in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen.

Zaire president authorises constitutional referendum

KINSHASA (Agencies) — Zaire's President Mobutu Sese Seku has promulgated an order paving the way for a constitutional referendum, a crucial step leading to democratic elections in his crisis-ridden country.

Under a time line imposed by the National Election Commission, the referendum on a draft constitution, whose text was adopted in August by the country's transitional government, is to be held in February.

The constitution is to be the underpinning of a federal state to be called the Federal Republic of the Congo with a bicameral parliament.

General, presidential and legislative elections are to be held in May, with completion of the seven-year transition process set for July.

Mr. Mobutu, who has presided over Zaire's economic and political decline for more than three decades, returned to Kinshasa on Dec. 17 after four months in Switzerland and France for prostate cancer surgery and convalescence.

In a new development, the leader of rebels Monday said the army had launched a counter-attack on rebel positions south of the eastern town of Uvira.

"The Zaire army attacked Fizi and the villages around it 8 p.m. (18:00 GMT) last night and fought until this morning when the forces of the alliance repulsed them," Laurent Kabila, head of the rebel Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL), told journalists in Goma.

Mr. Kabila said a smaller attack had also taken place at Itombwe, 40 kilometres from Uvira, and that the army had again been pushed back.

Mr. Mobutu last week named a new government whose primary responsibility is to crush the rebels.

Meanwhile, faced with running a slice of conquered land, Zairean rebels have simply adopted the administration already in place despite its reputation for inefficiency and corruption.

The rebels of the ADF say they are fighting to overthrow President Mobutu whose 31-year rule has impoverished a nation whose mineral wealth could have made it one of the richest in Africa.

In three months the rebels have carved a narrow slice of land from Zaire's eastern border over 500 kilometres long, occupying the major eastern towns of Goma and Bukavu.

But the rebel liberation has changed little in the way the system was run by Mr. Mobutu's henchmen.

Step into the new passport office in Goma and a visitor could be forgiven for thinking nothing had changed in the dark and crowded corridors.

Paperwork has piled ever higher as people rush to replace now useless Zairean identity cards with passes from "the Democratic Republic of Congo."

"The system is the same, but the methods are different," rebel leader Laurent Kabila told Reuters.

"We cannot expel everybody at once because there would be chaos."

And as rebel fighters have gone deeper into the forests and hills government offices have steadily reopened in Goma.

Old files have been dug out and new forms printed where the only difference is the change from Zaire to Congo, the name given by Belgian colonialists and changed by Mr. Mobutu to erase the colonial past.

Even at the Internal Intelligence Headquarters only the big bosses who fled before the rebel advance have been replaced — most of the agents are doing the same jobs as before.

"There has been a noticeable change in dealing with the bureaucracy, it doesn't cost as much as it did and the charges seem more official than they were. At least for the moment," said one expatriate worker in Goma.

But Mr. Kabila has asked civil servants to work without pay for the good of the "revolution."

They will remain unpaid until the new rulers can find enough money by exploiting the mineral and agricultural wealth in the occupied territory, which include gold and coffee.

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Exclusivity not for all seasons

THE MERE convening in Cairo this week of the foreign ministers of the Damascus Declaration states suggests that the reasons which led to the signing of the declaration in 1991 are still relevant. The signatories, the six-member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in addition to Syria and Egypt, had established a kind of defence pact to meet a variety of threats and challenges which obviously were not confined to ramifications of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait that prompted them to get together in the first place. While the immediate dangers created by the occupation of Kuwait in 1990 have been effectively dealt with, a string of other conflicts and disputes affecting the security and stability of the Gulf region has neither vanished nor shortened.

The ongoing row between Qatar and Bahrain over the Hawar Island confirms the need for a continued role for Arab countries to strengthen Gulf stability and security. This is not to mention the Arab-Iranian dispute over three Arab Gulf islands that Iran took by force many years ago.

Manama has effectively taken the initiative to resolve its quarrel with Doha when the Bahraini emir, Sheikh Isa Ben Salman Al Khalifa, issued a decree on Saturday pardoning two Qatari citizens accused of spying. The step by Sheikh Isa was taken apparently in a bid to lay the necessary groundwork for the meeting in Cairo to try to reduce the strain in relations with Qatar. The formation of a four-member committee by the foreign ministers to solve the territorial dispute was therefore a natural next step to this gesture. This goes to show how wise it is for Arab countries to endeavour settling their disputes through their own institutions rather than submit them to foreign or international arbitration or intervention.

Meanwhile, the countries of the Damascus Declaration should think of opening the door for more Arab countries to join the effort for solving inter-Arab disputes and problems. For example, Jordan, which enjoys extremely good relations with both Doha and Manama, might have been invited to play a role and that would have further ensured more Arab cooperation and coordination. In the end, for Arab woes to disappear there needs to be a common, dedicated effort by all Arabs towards that end. Exclusive clubs and closed circles will not be able to accomplish the same mission. These can achieve certain goals at certain times. But what is needed more than ever before is a return to comprehensive vision and all-encompassing joint action.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

APART FROM the international pressure on the Israeli government to comply with the requirements of peace, there is need to bring about a change in the Israeli society's stand towards the Israeli government and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and try force him to change his policy, said Sultan Hattab, a writer for Al Ra'i. Only when the Israeli society feels that it is facing danger and hardships as a result of Mr. Netanyahu's policies can it rise against the present government and its practices, he said. At the same time, the Palestinians should maintain and intensify their resistance to Israel's policies by all possible means and should try to isolate Israel's governments in world circles, demanded the writer. At the pan-Arab level, there is dire need for Arab regimes to back the Palestinians by deed rather than word because the danger inherent in the Israeli policies threatens the whole Arab Nation. Thus, they have to take all measures that can deter Mr. Netanyahu from pursuing his aggressive policy, said the writer. He said that the world community also has to realise that the Israeli premier is committing acts far more dangerous to the Middle East, and the world at large, than those committed by Iraq which prompted the Western nations to wage war on Baghdad. The writer said the world cannot remain passive any more and must move to end Israel's intransigence and help the people of this region enjoy peace and security.

A WRITER for Al Dustour warned against the sale of land in Palestine to Israel through American and other agents, especially within the Hebron and the Jerusalem areas. The Israelis and their allies are active nowadays trying to acquire lands in Palestinian territory by all means and by offering large sums of money to Palestinians who are unable to cope with the continued pressure and repression exercised by the Israeli government, said Saleh Qulub. The writer called for the creation of a special land fund, by the wealthy Palestinians in the diaspora, to purchase lands in the occupied Arab territories and in the self-rule areas so as to prevent the Israelis and their agents from acquiring them and so protect the national heritage and the Arab identity of Palestine. The writer suggested that such lands could be registered in the name of the Christian and Islamic Waqf (endowment) so that nobody can have the right to dispose with them through any transaction, regardless of the price that could be offered for the land. He noted that the Israelis, since the creation of their state in Palestine, have been keen on pursuing the drive to acquire lands by all means and prevent the Palestinians from establishing their independent state.

The View from Fourth Circle

Where are the holy men in this holy season in the holy land?

By Rami G. Khouri

CHRISTIANS AND Jews around the world this month celebrate the twin religious occasions of Christmas and Hanukkah, and Muslims prepare for the holy month of Ramadan. It is striking, though, how small and peripheral a role religion has played as a force of peace making, conflict resolution and reconciliation in this holy land that is so dear to all three monotheistic religions, yet so tortured by intercommunal mistrust and violence. Sadly, but not surprisingly in historical terms, religion has tended to play a divisive role in the modern Arab-Israeli conflict. This is especially evident in the deadly combination of intemperate politics and indiscriminate violence that is practised. It is high time that Arabs and Israelis explore the possibility of drawing on their shared religious heritage as a source of moral solidarity in order to achieve political reconciliation, national coexistence and personal rapprochement. This may sound like a naive dream. I think it is a realistic possibility — but only if our political and religious leaders work together to overcome their people's cycle of narrow fears and long-running confrontations, and to grasp the power of religion as perhaps the single most neglected and underutilised force for peace and justice in this region.

It is not easy to imagine religion as a force for reconciliation in a landscape dominated nowadays by the zealotry of some Israeli Jews who claim exclusive ownership of Jerusalem, Hebron and other holy sites, and of some Arab Muslims and Christians who kill Israeli civilians because they see no place for Jews in this land. We have allowed self-serving and often militant demagogues amongst us to hijack our faiths and moralities and direct them heavily into existential, zero-sum battles for land and identity. These battles have not only resulted in frustrating and costly stalemates between Arabs and Israelis; they have also degraded the essential positive moral power of religion as we know it.

Religion for most Middle Eastern people plays a far more structural, dynamic and public role that it does in secular Western societies. A quick glance around the Middle East suggests the many different, mostly positive, dimensions that religion assumes in the lives of individuals, communities and nations. For Muslims, Christians and Jews in this area, religion is not only a spiritual force that answers the big questions about where we came from, why we are here, and how we should conduct ourselves in society. It is also deeply ingrained in our Semitic and Middle Eastern societies as a defining force in our personal, communal and national identities. Its role and relevance have been accentuated in many cases by several contemporary phenomena, such as: the weakness of the modern Middle Eastern state; the inability of temporal politics and economics to respond to people's basic needs

for material protection and progress; the indignity of many top-heavy, very centralised governance systems that deny ordinary people a sense of responsibility in determining their own fate; and, in many cases, the modern security state's explicit prohibition of ordinary people turning to their religion in an organised manner to challenge oppression or injustice.

Most Arab states explicitly base their legal systems on Islamic law and tradition, and many Arab leaders derive much of their legitimacy from their religious lineage. Israel as a state defines itself on the basis of religion — a state of the Jewish people — and has reconstituted itself on land that the Jews believe was allocated to them by no lesser an authority and benefactor than God himself.

"For Muslims, Christians and Jews in this area, religion is not only a spiritual force that answers the big questions about where we came from, why we are here, and how we should conduct ourselves in society. It is also deeply ingrained in our Semitic and Middle Eastern societies as a defining force in our personal, communal and national identities."

Religion in this region plays an explicit, enduring and powerful national role, alongside its functions of personal spirituality and communal morality. But it is very odd that our three monotheistic religions — which share such profound and central emphasis on values of mercy, forgiveness, righteousness, tolerance and love — should be almost totally and institutionally absent from the current quest for peace, justice, reconciliation and coexistence. This failure is doubly glaring in contrast with the spirited role — "spirited" in all its senses — that organised religion has played in conflict resolution in other parts of the world, notably in South Africa and Latin America, but also in many other places such as East Timor, Eastern Europe, the Horn of Africa and others.

In most parts of the Middle East, religious leaderships tend to be co-opted and managed by the modern security state; but many authentic and independent religious lead-

erships remain active in Christian, Muslim and Jewish societies. If they remain true to their prophetic heritage, moral mission and spiritual dictates — and I am sure that most of them do — then it is high time that they step out of the shadows of fear and hatred, and reinvigorate our Middle Eastern political cultures with the same activism for justice and humanism that is deeply etched into the very fiber of religiosity in this area.

The idea that overt political action by spiritual leaders is inappropriate may be both historically inaccurate and morally unacceptable. The three great monotheistic prophets — Moses, Jesus and Mohammad — collectively triggered the single largest, most enduring global movement of morality-grounded organised cult because they combined issues of personal spirituality with principles of public equity and ethics. They played God's wisdom about righteousness in the realms of the private and the public, the home and the community, the personal and the political. Moses, Jesus and Mohammad and their cumulative prophetic missions endure today because they dared, in their days, to challenge the injustices of temporal orders and to work for new orders based on mercy and equity. Those Jewish, Muslim and Christian religious leaders in the Middle East today, who refrain from challenging violence and nationalistic intemperance and who prefer to remain secluded in the relative calm of their own private spirituality and ceremonial communal liturgy, may doom their forms of faith to a slow, agonising slide into irrelevance.

This season of religious significance for Jews, Muslims and Christians throughout the holy land challenges us not only to reflect on our own spirituality, but also to understand and to activate the greater power that our faiths can muster for our collective well-being. Our confrontations in this region are predominantly national, not religious. The resolution to our national conflicts, however, must include and build upon the common tenets of our shared faiths. The battles that plague our holy land have tended to focus heavily on the contentious issue of land. It is time to address in a more serious and productive manner the other, holy, side of that equation.

The rich, historical, moral legacy that makes this land so holy and so dear to us all demands that Christian, Muslim and Jewish religious leaders step forward in unison to deny the retributive, selfish and exclusivist claims of narrow nationalists in favor of the expansive, inclusive and merciful promise of our single God. The men and women of religion should step forward in this blessed, simultaneous, season of Christmas, Hanukkah and Ramadan to remind us of the eternal relevance of our spirituality and the enduring responsibility of their leadership.

Netanyahu's vision excludes a Palestinian state

By Anthony Lewis

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM — Palestinian leaders are holding up renewal of peace negotiations under the Oslo accord, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says, in order to keep Israel under pressure. Now, "coddled by the international community," they are planning violence. Mr. Netanyahu made those points, among others, in a recent interview. He was in an expansive mood as he laid out his ideas for a solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In recent weeks negotiations have seemingly broken down over the terms of an Israeli troop withdrawal from the West Bank city of Hebron, which was supposed to have happened months ago. But Mr. Netanyahu said the differences over Hebron were "marginal."

"What is preventing agreement on Hebron," he said, "is Palestinian fear that agreement would reduce pressure on Israel" to move towards Palestinian views on the larger issue of a final settlement. Before he won the election last May, Mr. Netanyahu said, the Palestinians "thought they had an Israeli government that would give them a state on the 1967 boundaries and would divide Jerusalem."

Now, he said, they want to force a government of different views in the same direction. "They want a guaranteed result before the negotiations," he said. "They are basically saying: 'Give me a down payment in advance, a promise, that at the end of the negotiations I will have what I want. Then I will negotiate with you.'"

"Our intelligence people are telling us that for the last three weeks they have been putting in place the mechanism for renewed

M. KAHIL



bouts of violence. And why shouldn't they? They think they gained from violence the last time. They were coddled by the international community when they fired weapons at us on the trumped-up charge of this tunnel in the Old City of Jerusalem that supposedly was undermining the mosque.

"So they'll have Israel condemned and try to unify the Arab World."

"What you have is the idea that violence pays and you negotiate under the continuing threat of violence. And to the extent that the international community has given them automatic support, they are less interested in forging agreements and compromises along the way."

In his election campaign, Mr. Netanyahu condemned the agreements made with the Palestinians by the Labour government and said he would provide peace with greater security. How would he do that? I asked. He said his solution had two aspects: "territorial and functional."

"Most of Judea and

Samaria," he said, using the biblical terms for the West Bank. "is unpopulated. There are areas in there, mostly unpopulated, which are crucial to Israel's security." He added that those same areas contain most of the Jewish settlements planted in the West Bank since Israel occupied the territory in 1967.

As for the functional aspect, Mr. Netanyahu said Israel would have to maintain control at all times of borders, strategic heights, "the Jordan Valley entrance" and airspace. And he said even Israeli "advocates of so-called statehood" for Palestinians thought Israel should "at least have a veto" over the use of water.

The necessary limitations on Palestinian control, the prime minister said, were "not consonant with the concept of sovereignty."

So his solution would be to give the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) most civil powers in areas where most Palestinians live but would exclude a Palestinian state.

"Unbridled self-determin-

ation" for the Palestinians, he said, could not be limited to the West Bank but "would inevitably move into the Galilee and the Negev," where one million Israeli Arabs live.

Only the cities of the West Bank are now under full control of Yasser Arafat's PNA. Under Oslo, Israel was to have redeployed its forces from a large part of the West Bank by now, with negotiations on a final settlement to follow.

"I intend to begin negotiations on a final settlement a lot earlier than people think," Mr. Netanyahu said, "and begin redeployment at the same time."

"The fact that I may disagree with the Palestinians on the shape of the final settlement does not mean that I would scuttle the process."

"We have committed ourselves to it. Oslo is a mechanism, not a solution. There has to be compromise, but so far there's very little sign that the Palestinians are prepared for it."

The New York Times

LETTERS

Special centre for special people

To the Editor:

The article "Centre for Special Education bemoans lack of funds" (Jordan Times, Dec. 15, 1996) was not very accurate. I would therefore like to make a few points for the sake of accuracy.

The centre was established in 1972 by the Young Muslim Women's Association (YMWA) and is chaired by HRH Princess Sarvath Al Hassan. It has been serving a number of children with mental disabilities based on its motto: creating a bright future for those who are less fortunate.

The Centre for Special Education (CSE), one of the YMWA's main projects, caters for 170 students with mental disabilities. It provides comprehensive services for children in three sections: pre-school, primary school and pre-vocational. The last one offers training for students who are 16 and older in five different fields: horticulture, window-washing, domestic science, wood-working, weaving and ceramics. The centre is also expanding to include two other pre-vocational units to accommodate the students' various abilities.

However, not content with restricting its services to only educating the students, the YMWA also started securing jobs for their graduates. CSE Director Ghassoon Kareh stated that "the centre's major goal is to train and educate the students to meet their full potential and gain the maximum independence to acquire their productive roles in the society." To meet this goal, the YMWA established The Sheltered Workshop in Sahab which employs graduates in a factory for wood and metal work.

Many private companies, including schools, bought their furniture from The Sheltered Workshop. So far, 90 students were hired by either the open market or The Sheltered Workshop upon graduating from centres for special education. However, The Sheltered Workshop only provided jobs for graduates with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. It had an assembly section that served students with additional disabilities, but the programme proved inadequate due to lack of expertise available in the country. In addition, the expenses needed to maintain this section were very high.

The Parents and Friends Society for the Disabled asked the YMWA to maintain this section until they could find proper instructors and sufficient funding. Unfortunately, after three years of futile waiting, the section had to be shut down. The YMWA could not meet the demands required to uphold the quality of instruction and services required.

One of the restrictions such institutions face is their inability to execute certain projects for lack of funds. The YMWA centre, for example, collects only 15 per cent of its total budget through tuition fees, considering that most of the students enrolled in the programme come from poor families.

It is remarkable how rewarding such programmes are, serving both students and members of the community. It is also inspiring to see the art work these students produce. As a centre who cares for its students, the YMWA centre continuously upgrades its art projects and allows the students' kinetic talents to be revealed.

The centre is very grateful for the support funded by the government and the few friends it has in the community. However, to carry on the centre's mission, it is essential to gain the support of other community members. The centre is not only helping those who are special, it is also helping the community by utilising the students' abilities to produce for our society.

Serene Kareh,
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Iraq says oil-for-food deal falls far short of Iraqis' medical needs

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq said Monday that the humanitarian deal with the United Nations would fail to meet its needs for medicine and called for an increase in its oil export quotas.

"Funds to buy medicine will be no more than \$210 million, which amounts to a drop in the ocean given our needs in this area," Health Minister Umid Medhat Mubarak told Baghdad radio.

Under the oil-for-food deal which took effect on Dec. 9, Iraq can sell \$2 billion of oil every six months to buy food and medicine, but more than one-third of the proceeds are earmarked for U.N. costs and war reparations.

The minister hoped the United Nations would increase the quantity of oil Iraq is allowed to export under the deal.

Two billion dollars are needed to rehabilitate hospitals and the overall health sector which has suffered under the U.N. economic sanctions imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, Mr. Mubarak said.

He said the mortality rate for children under five years old had increased drastically since the embargo was imposed, rising from 500 to 4,500 deaths per month.

Iraq expects to reach a deal with Egypt to buy \$200 million of basic goods under the oil-for-food deal, an Iraqi official in Cairo said.

Nabil Negm, Iraq's permanent delegate to the Cairo-based Arab League, said the deal aimed to cover Baghdad's needs for cooking oil and detergents over the next six months.

The deal "goes hand in hand with Iraq's constant

policy of giving priority to Arab companies as long as the quality of their merchandise is not inferior to those of foreign companies," Mr. Negm told AFP.

A delegation from two public Egyptian pharmaceutical companies arrived in Baghdad on Monday for a 10-day visit to discuss "ways of meeting the needs of Iraqi people for pharmaceutical products," Egypt's MENA news agency said.

Participation of Egyptian experts in the reopening of an Iraqi pharmaceutical factory in Al Samra will also be examined, the agency added.

Mr. Negm was quoted by the government newspaper Al Akhbar as saying the Egyptian delegation is also expected to conclude other deals to sell pharmaceutical products, medical materials and foodstuffs for \$13 to \$40 million.

Mubarak hears Israeli pacifists' suggestions on peace process

CAIRO (AFP) — Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak met a delegation of Israeli pacifists here Monday who said they would like to link up with Egyptian peace activists to revive the Middle East peace process.

"We made new suggestions (to Mubarak) for future cooperation between peace movements in Israel and Egypt," said Terzili Rashid, one of the eight Peace Now delegates who arrived here Sunday night.

"We hope in particular to build new activities between peace forces in Israel and Egypt," Mr. Rashid said, adding that Peace Now would remain in contact with Mr. Mubarak's advisor, Osama Al Baz.

Mr. Baz said he was pleased by the Israeli movement's "moderate position," but stressed that "Egypt does not intervene in internal Israeli affairs."

"President Mubarak regu-

larly receives representatives of various Israeli organisations to explain to them our points of view and to create a favourable Israeli public opinion of the peace process," Mr. Baz said.

On the accord on Israeli military redeployment from the West Bank town of Hebron, which Israel and Palestinians say will likely be signed Tuesday, Mr. Baz said: "We hope that the next two days will bring concrete progress. There are two obstacles but it is possible that they will be overcome Monday so as to result in an agreement Tuesday."

Mr. Baz added that before meeting Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat Sunday night, Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai telephoned Mr. Mubarak to ask for "Egypt's help" to overcome these obstacles, which he did not identify.

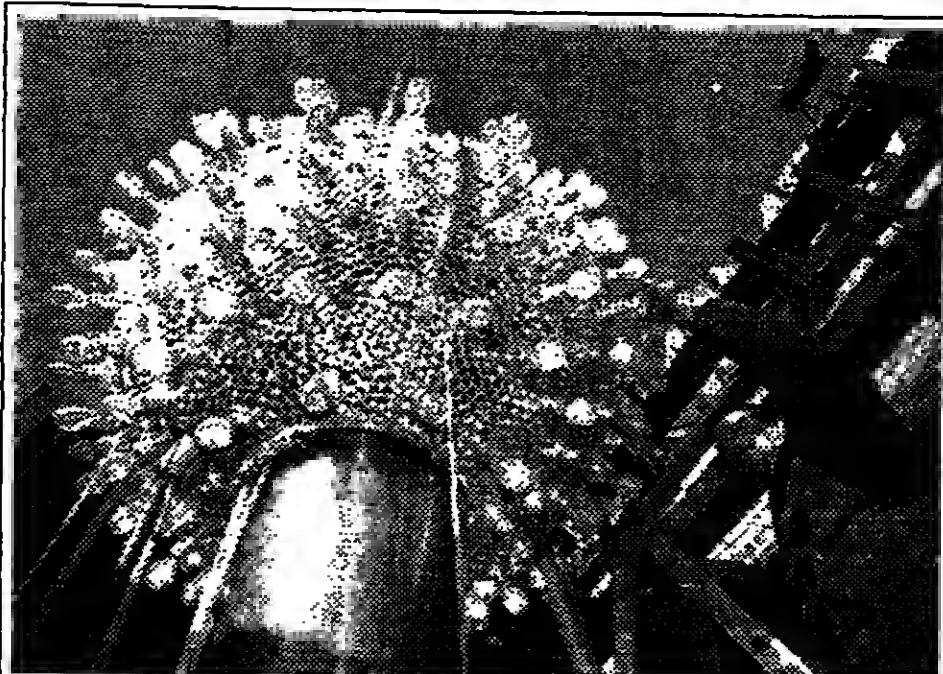
Meanwhile, Israel's ambassador to Egypt, Zvi Mazel, called Monday for

dissociating Israeli-Egyptian relations from the ups and downs of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

"Each crisis in the Israeli-Palestinian talks should not have repercussions on relations between Israel and Egypt because the Egyptian-Israeli peace is the basis of the Middle East" peace process, Mr. Mazel told reporters after talks with Nabil Fahmi, advisor to Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa.

"Egypt is the largest country in the Middle East, and it is the founder of peace in the region, that's why it must use every effort possible to maintain Egyptian-Israeli relations," said Mr. Mazel.

The Peace Now delegation was led by one of its founders, historian, writer and former member of parliament Mordechai Bazzani, who said Sunday night that they expected to ask Mr. Mubarak "to continue his efforts for Arab-Israeli peace."



NEW YEAR BALL: A workman checks one of 180 lights on the 200-kilogramme New Year's Eve ball in Times Square in New York. One minute before midnight on New Year's Eve the ball will begin its descent from a nearly 25-metre flagpole as an estimated crowd of 500,000 watches from the street (Reuters photo)

More than 100 killed in Indian train blast blamed on dissidents

GUWAHATI (AFP) — More than 100 people were feared killed Monday when a powerful bomb ripped apart a train in the far-eastern Indian state of Assam, witnesses and police said.

It is believed to be the most serious attack in troubled eastern India, which has been the scene of decades of fighting between tribal rebels and government forces.

The explosion occurred on the Brahmaputra Mail, travelling to New Delhi, near Kokrajhar district in Assam, 216 kilometres from this state capital, a police official said.

A correspondent of a local Assamese daily who visited the site and spoke with police there said: "More than 100 people have died in the explosion. Police have not given the official toll."

"Three compartments in the middle got blown away. There were at least 300 passengers in these compartments when the explosion occurred."

There were some 1,500 people on the train at the time of the explosion, he added. The correspondent

said most of the passengers in the compartments torn apart in the blast were from Assam.

"The blast took place at 7:15 p.m. (1330 GMT), a few minutes after the train left the Kokrajhar station for New Delhi," said a deputy commissioner of police.

A police official said he feared "over a 100 casualties," though medical and rescue teams were yet to reach the scene as the explosion occurred at a remote village.

He said 10 compartments of the train were badly damaged in the blast.

"The train got derailed and travelled for a few minutes before it halted," the official added.

A Kokrajhar district hospital official said all doctors had been on strike since last week in protest at the killing of one of their colleagues.

"The army doctors and medical personnel from paramilitary forces have been asked to report for duty immediately to look after the injured in the blast," the official said.

A railway official at

Kokrajhar station said: "The only way to reach the blast site is by the railway track" and a "railway recovery van" had left three hours after the blast took place.

"We are sending a recovery van to the site as it is the only solution left to us," the railway official said.

"The rescue teams and medical teams are coming along with us."

Earlier Monday, more than 5,000 trucks were stranded and road links between the eastern states and the rest of the country severed after tribal rebels blasted a key bridge in Assam.

Police said guerrillas from the outlawed Bodo Liberation Tiger Force destroyed the bridge — some 200 kilometres from Guwahati — which links Assam and six other states to the rest of India.

They said 10 people were seriously injured in the explosion, caused by a remote controlled bomb.

Bodo tribals, who have been fighting for a tribal homeland carved out of Assam and nearby states, have killed hundreds of

Report: Israel, PNA abuse human rights

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Israel and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) both violate human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories in breach of the Oslo peace accords, according to a study by two human rights groups.

The report by Betsalem, the Israeli information centre on human rights in the territories, and the Palestinian human rights surveillance group, accused Israel of numerous abuses, including torture and maltreatment of prisoners.

"Israel is responsible for multiple violations of even the most elementary rights," said the study, which covers the period from the start of Palestinian autonomy in July 1994 to December 1996.

The PNA was also guilty of violations in the self-rule areas, the report said.

The list of Israel's violations included torture, arbitrary detention, maltreatment of Palestinian prisoners, attacks on freedom of movement and collective punishments.

In addition, the Israelis were guilty of expropriating land to benefit Jewish settlements, hindering economic and educational rights and preventing family gatherings, as a result of various closures around the territories.

The human rights record of the PNA in the self-rule areas and its commitments under the 1995 peace accords came under fire as well.

"Arbitrary detentions, prisoner deaths, illegal trials, a lack of press freedom and restrictions imposed on human rights defence organisations" are equally common in the autonomous zones, the report said.

Government defends tariff

(Continued from page 1)

taking effect on Jan. 1, the minister said, was not taken in consultation with the government.

In any event, he said, the government need not be consulted over the issue.

The National Society for Consumer Protection issued a statement on Sunday criticising the increase in prices of newspapers and accusing the private sector in general of making profits at the expense of the consumer.

sumer.

"We are surprised by this decision," the statement said, describing the move as the latest hike following the increase in the price of bread in August.

The society contended that the price of newspapers should have been decreased by 35 per cent instead of the announced increase and that revenues from advertisements should cover the extra costs incurred by the press establishments.

Chances seen for Lima talks

(Continued from page 1)

over 420 the number of captives freed since the rebels stormed the residence during a reception in honour of Japanese Emperor Akihito.

On Sunday Red Cross officials were the only outsiders to enter the building. They brought 110 rations of food, including 20 for diabetics, and candles for the 10 lanterns which have provided the only light since

fuel for a power generator ran out over a week ago.

Mr. Minig warned that Saturday's events did not guarantee an early end to the crisis.

"The fact that members of the guerrilla group and representatives of the government met does not mean the problem is simple," he said. "It means that discussions are starting and disagreement is still there."

Bahraini pilot defects to Qatar

(Continued from page 1)

Court of Justice at the Hague, although it finally agreed in September to submit its own case to the court.

Bahrain says the dispute should be resolved among Gulf states.

In their first remarks since convicted of espionage, the two Qatari citizens said Sunday that Qatar forced them to spy on Bahrain.

Mr. Baker, 28, and Ms. Fakhri, 33, appeared pale and tense as interviewers on Bahrain television pressed them for confirmation that Qatar was behind the spying. "Qatar's intelligence service trapped us

into this," Mr. Bakker said. "There were no parties other than Qatar."

Mr. Fakhri said she "regretted (the crime) more than Mr. Fahd because I've lived here and was raised here."

Qatar had denied that the two were guilty. The two Qataris were sentenced Wednesday to three years in prison for spying on Bahrain and for accepting money for their services. The prosecution had demanded the maximum penalty of 20 years.

Bahrain's ruler, Sheikh Isa Ben Salman Al Khalifa, pardoned the two after they sent him a written appeal for forgiveness.

Security Council rebukes Iraq

(Continued from page 1)

ceasing more operational missiles than have been accounted for, and may also have used foreign components to boost its home-grown missile force.

Mr. Ekeus told the Security

Council last Wednesday that Iraq was suspected of holding a "missile force of significance," thanks to the Scuds imported in the 1980s from the Soviet Union.

Mr. Ekeus has not mentioned specific figures, but he has said in the past that as many as 16 missiles were unaccounted for. The number is now believed to be as high as 18-25.

U.S. Ambassador Edward Gnehm, the number two at the U.N. mission to the United Nations, said that "Chairman Ekeus' determination that Iraq is maintaining an operational missile capability is an extremely serious concern."

Mr. Gnehm accused Iraq of continuing to "obstruct through manipulation and deception the activities of UNSCOM" in trying to fulfill its mandate.

The Security Council is to meet again on Tuesday when it is expected to renew the sanctions against Iraq at its regular two-monthly review.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Muslim gathering appeals for peace

TONGI, Bangladesh (R) — An estimated two million Muslims from around the world wound up a three-day annual gathering on Monday with mass prayers calling for peace through the practising of Islamic tenets, organisers said. Islamic scholars urged devotees to shun luxuries, follow the teachings of Islam and seek blessings from God. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her arch rival Begum Khaleda Zia, chief of the main opposition Bangladesh nationalist party, attended the annual ceremony at Tongi, 18 kilometres north of Dhaka. Held on the bank of river Turag, the event, called Biswa Jitna, drew Muslims from more than 70 countries, including Britain, the United States, France, Germany, China, India and most Muslim nations, organisers said. Nearly 80 couples were married at the Jitna, which is believed to have been held at the same venue for more than 100 years.

British diplomat visits detained nurses

RIYADH (AFP) — A British diplomat met Monday with two British nurses jailed in Saudi Arabia on charges of murdering an Australian colleague at the hospital where they worked, an embassy spokesman said. Consul Tim Lamb met for 15 minutes each with Lucille McLaughlan, 31, from Dundee, and Deborah Perry, 41, from the Midlands, at the prison in the eastern city of Dammam, the British spokesman said. "We're contacting the families to pass on the information," the spokesman said without providing details. An embassy spokesman said Sunday that consular officials would meet with the suspects early this week to discuss legal representation for them, but did not confirm that the subject had been raised on Monday.

Iranian mosques ordered to clean up

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran's health authorities have ordered some 40,000 mosques in Iran to ban smoking and ensure that cleanliness on the premises is up to hygiene standards, newspapers reported Monday. The smoking ban in mosques is a "sign of respect" for the prayer sites, the health ministry said in its directive. Under the new rules, mosques' trustees boards are obliged to see that staff wear clean uniforms and have access to liquid soap and clean towels for ablution before prayers. In addition, the toilets must be cleaned and disinfected on a weekly basis. And soft drinks must be served in disposable cups. The Shiite Muslim clergy has been urging mosque caretakers to go on a cleaning campaign in preparation for the fasting month of Ramadan, which begins here Jan. 11.

Tutankhamun thief sentenced to jail

CAIRO (AFP) — A burglar who tried to steal the treasure of Tutankhamun from the Cairo museum in September was sentenced to three years in prison Monday by Cairo's criminal court, a judiciary official said. Amr Sabri Mahmoud, a 25-year-old unemployed Egyptian, was arrested Sept. 12 after taking a dagger, two bracelets, a pendant, two bronze cats and 18 earthenware rings, part of the treasure of the Pharaoh Tutankhamun. The next day, Egyptian Culture Minister Farouk Hosni decided to free up 25 million Egyptian pounds (about \$7.3 million) to modernise the museum's security system. Mahmoud's was the third attempt to steal items from the museum, which opened in central Cairo in 1902. More than 100,000 objects are exhibited there and even more are in storage. The treasure of Tutankhamun, discovered in 1922 in the Valley of the Kings burial ground in southern Egypt, is the museum's most precious collection.

Prime minister assures capital market

(Continued from page 1)

ence on investment in Jordan to be held in London in May 1997 with the participation of at least 60 directors of major world financial institutions along with major Jordanian firms.

The Swiss bank has expressed readiness to help Jordan present its investment opportunities in the world through this conference, he added.

Mr. Kabarti on Sunday evening told a meeting organised by the Jordan Trade Association (JTA) that the government will continue to back the association's efforts and help its endeavours towards promoting and increasing the volume of Jordanian exports through relevant laws and regulations and through simplifying export procedures.

"We realise that the main role in the production process lies with the private sector and therefore it has endorsed laws to create

opportune climates and offer incentives to the producers and exporters," said Mr. Kabarti.

"The government pursues efforts to ensure financial stability, create jobs, remove economic imbalances from which we have suffered for long and reduce the burden of indebtedness," he said.

He noted that the privatisation process in Jordan could not have been possible had the country failed to adopt an economic restructuring programme.

Stressing the importance of maintaining a balanced partnership between the private and the public sectors, Mr. Kabarti said that Jordan's economic agreements with other countries aim at facilitating the Kingdom's exports.

"The rapid changes in the world economy and the recent developments in our region make it imperative on us to move towards removing trade barriers so as to boost Jordanian

exports competitiveness abroad," he said. "For this reason the Kingdom is keen on concluding an association agreement with the European Union and joining the World Trade Organisation."

Through these two instruments, he said, Jordan will be following in the footsteps of other countries, especially those in the Far East, and will certainly be able to boost its exports.

Referring to the general situation in the Middle East, the prime minister said: "No economic stability and prosperity can be achieved in the region without political stability and the establishment of a permanent and comprehensive peace."

He said that the Jordan-Israel peace treaty was intended by the Kingdom as a model for the aspired comprehensive and just peace adding that the Kingdom will pursue efforts for achieving peace on all Israeli-Arab tracks.

Hebron agreement could be signed today

(Continued from page 1)

site for both Muslims and Jews, where a Jewish extremist massacred 30 Muslim worshippers in 1994.

Israel rejects a joint police presence, saying it would cause confusion.

The Palestinians also seek guarantees that Israel will continue the peace process after a Hebron pull-out, specifically by committing to other articles in the 1995 Oslo self-rule accords, which like the Hebron handover, have been left unimplemented.

In particular, the Palestinians seek a timetable for further Israeli troop withdrawals from West Bank rural areas and the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, which Mr.

Arafat said he wants to take place at the same time as the signing of a Hebron accord.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat told reporters on Saturday that Israeli troops would redeploy one week after an accord is signed.

An official Syrian newspaper said, meanwhile, that a Hebron agreement will not revive the troubled Middle East peace process.

"Israel's objective with this agreement is not to end its occupation or to relaunch the peace process, but to deceive the Arabs and the world by having them think the government has regained its reason," said the daily Tishrin.

Mr. Netanyahu's top policy adviser, David Bar-Ilan, said meanwhile, a Tuesday summit

with Mr. Arafat was possible if the Palestinians dropped some of their last-minute demands concerning Hebron and the continuation of the peace process.

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy said a Hebron agreement would be presented to Israel's parliament for approval. Mr. Levy made the unexpected promise during a parliament debate on a motion of no-confidence filed by the far-right opposition Mokedet Party over the emerging Hebron deal.

The government survived the vote by 47-2, with 34 abstentions.

Only the two authors of the motion, deputies Rehavam Ze'evi and Benny Elion of the Mokedet, supported the motion

seeking to bring down the Netanyahu government.

Forty-seven deputies voted against the no confidence motion while 34 abstained, mostly members of the opposition Labour Party. Thirty-seven of the 120 members of the Knesset were not in the chamber for the vote.

Israel army radio said Mr. Levy had not consulted with Mr. Netanyahu before making the pledge, and that the prime minister was angry with him for doing so. Netanyahu advisers have said it was not necessary to seek parliamentary approval since the autonomy accords that stipulate an Israeli pullback in Hebron were already passed by the legislature in 1994 and 1995.

Jordan to increase oil purchases from Iraq

By P.V. Vivekanand
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — One of the key objectives of a visit to Iraq by two Jordanian ministers is to renew an annual agreement under which Iraq supplies oil to the Kingdom. Information Minister Marwan Muasher said Monday.

Iraqi oil supplies to Jordan are exempt from the sweeping international sanctions imposed on Iraq since August 1990. The supplies are also not related to the oil-for-food deal that Baghdad has signed with the United Nations.

Reports from Baghdad said Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Hashem Dabbas and Finance Minister Marwan Awad had started talks with Iraqi officials on renewing the oil agreement and issues related to Baghdad's debts to the Kingdom.

Dr. Dabbas was also quoted as saying that Jordan was seeking up to 4.5 million tonnes of crude oil and fuel oil from Iraq in fiscal 1997, an increase of seven per cent over 1996.

Briefing reporters in Amman, Dr. Muasher described the visit of the two ministers as routine and

aimed at renewing standing arrangements with Iraq on the supply of oil and settlement of the oil bills.

The information minister also said it was "unlikely" that the trade protocol between the two countries would undergo any major changes for the year 1997.

"We do not expect any major changes to the trade accord," under which Jordan supplied goods and services worth \$220 million to Iraq in return for the oil supplies in 1996, said the minister.

The Kingdom used to supply goods and services worth \$400 million to Iraq until 1996, when mounting Iraqi debts to Amman forced it to reduce it to \$220 million.

Under the present conditions, Dr. Muasher told the briefing, Jordan simply cannot afford to spend the foreign exchange needed to pay for goods for reexports to Iraq.

"We have our own priorities of raising our foreign exchange reserves," he said. Dr. Muasher said Industry and Trade Minister Ali Abul Ragheh and Transport Minister Nasser Lawzi were scheduled to visit Iraq for finalising the 1997 trade protocol and discussing

transport-related issues.

Officials said the Joint Jordanian-Iraqi Economic Committee was scheduled to meet on Jan. 6.

In Baghdad, Dr. Dabbas and Mr. Awad are also expected to discuss issues related to Iraq's outstanding debts to Jordan, which Dr. Muasher estimated at \$1.3 billion. The two ministers are expected to hold talks with Oil Minister Amer Rasheed and Trade and Finance Minister Hikmat Mezban Ibrahim.

Also expected for discussion was a proposed project to build a pipeline to pump Iraqi oil. The two countries have already signed an initial understanding on the 500-kilometre pipeline, which will run from Iraq's northwestern oilfields to Jordan's only refinery at Zarqa.

At a later stage, a branch line will be built from the Iraqi border to Aqaba to feed a planned refinery on the Red Sea coast.

"These plans still exist, but circumstances blocked their execution," Dr. Dabbas was quoted as saying.

The pipeline will have a capacity to pump 100,000 barrels per day of crude, more than the Kingdom's present daily needs of

50,000 barrels of crude. Jordan also gets between 20,000 and 25,000 barrels per day of fuel oil. The energy needs are trucked overland from Iraq.

In comments carried by international agencies from Baghdad, Dr. Dabbas said Jordan will buy 4.5 million tonnes of crude oil and refined oil products from Iraq in 1997.

"All together between crude oil and by-products, (we are buying) 4.5 million tonnes (for 1997)," Dr. Dabbas was quoted as saying by Reuters.

The minister described Jordanian-Iraqi relations as excellent and said ties "will continue from better to best."

Between the two countries covered 4.4 million tonnes and Dr. Dabbas said this year's oil imports from Iraq would be seven per cent more than last year's.

Amman pays a market price for 25,000 bpd and for another 25,000 bpd of products. The rest is at concessionary terms, according to Reuters. The precise figures are not disclosed by officials from either side.

Dr. Dabbas said: "We will also decide on the grant (of oil) which Iraq gives (to

Bank of Israel warns against rising tax burden

TEL AVIV (RI) — The Bank of Israel said Sunday the sharp rise in the budget deficit and borrowing over the last two years would force the government to increase taxes in coming years.

"This deficit... was financed from public borrowing, both at home and overseas, against the background of insignificant privatisation revenues," the central bank's monetary division said.

"These loans have increased the overall government debt and in its wake the future tax burden that awaits the public," the bank pointed out. It said the government's combined domestic and foreign deficit had grown to approximately 11 billion shekels a year on average in 1995-96, compared with about six billion shekels annually in 1993-94. The foreign deficit includes budget items denominated in foreign currency. The wider deficit was financed by a one-third increase in domestic and overseas borrowing during the period. Government borrowing for new and recycled debt grew to about 36 billion shekels annually in 1995 and 1996, up from approximately 27 billion shekels annually in 1993 and 1994.

The Bank of Israel noted that the proportion of overall debt not linked to inflation had grown sharply. Unlinked borrowing accounted for 28 per cent of total borrowing in 1996, up from just six per cent in 1993. Meanwhile, unlinked debt made up seven per cent of total debt, up from one per cent in 1993.

HOROSCOPE FORECAST FOR TUESDAY DECEMBER 31, 1996

By Thomas S. Pierson,
Astrologer, Carroll
Righter Foundation

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Plan how to handle routines today and communicate more wisely so that those in authority will admire your business like attitude. Study data you need for greater efficiency in your career activities thereby a bigwig will notice you.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Handle travel matters well at this time and you will be asked to make business decisions outside of the office. The evening is best for inviting in a few choice guests and enjoying like with close friends which are appreciated.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Find new ways to add to your present assets and you will have extra funds for a rainy day. Don't neglect to make out statements and reports which are necessary for a new project which you are involved in with fellow associates.

MOON CHILDREN: (June 22 to July 21) Every opportunity is yours today to gain data impossible to attain. Try to please your mate tonight with some special gift or doing something which he or she does not expect and thereby you will gain more romantic attention.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Conversations with your friends today will reveal how much assistance you are able to get from them to add to your prestige. Later this evening you will be able to meet with close friends and have a good time out on the town.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Make careful plans today for handling worldly affairs which will be beneficial to your career activities. Have a long talk with a bigwig who can be of assistance to you in completing some important new project which is waiting.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Study your credit and community affairs well today and improve them in some manner. Make new friends later this evening and you can spend quality time with them and you loved ones for they can make the days ahead fun.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Know where you are headed in business today and organize your affairs more intelligently. Plan a trip with your loved ones and have a pleasant time together in seeing places which are new to all of you.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Come to an agreement with fellow associates today and decide upon the best course of action to take on any business activities. Agree with your mate's ideas in the evening so that you can maintain harmony which has existed.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Improve the duties you have agreed to perform today and thereby you can make yourself more successful in the days ahead. Get into new projects with your fellow associates and you all will gain the recognition of a bigwig.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You understand how to be happier with regular recreations today, so plan to make it a fun time with close friends. Keep promised to fellow associates, also so that they will continue to provide you answers to business questions.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You can see today how to have success at home with your mate, so continue the same manner and thereby you can maintain harmony there. Take your loved ones out to dinner tonight you should be romantic.

Birthstone of December: Turquoise — Zircon.

Saudi income seen rising by \$10b in '96

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Saudi Arabia is expected to earn at least \$10 billion in extra income this year because of a surge in crude prices and higher non-oil exports, an official report has said.

The Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) said the windfall meant the deficit in the budget of the world's biggest oil producer and exporter could sharply drop or disappear but bankers said this depended on the level of actual spending.

"The additional revenues could cover as much as double the projected deficit in the kingdom's 1996 budget," a Saudi banker said. "But has the government stuck to projected expenditure? I agree the deficit will be reduced, but I do not expect it to be wiped out because part of the funds are used to pay outstanding dues to local contractors and farmers as well as

to boost international reserves."

In its quarterly report on Arab stock markets and economic performance, the AMF said Saudi Arabia had assumed an oil price of \$14 in preparing its 1996 budget. But the prices of the Saudi crudes have averaged \$18.5 in the first nine months and are expected to stay at that level by the year end.

Such an increase will boost the Gulf country's oil export earnings by around eight per cent to 125 billion Saudi riyals (\$33.3 billion) in 1996 while non-oil income will reach 45 billion riyals (\$12 billion).

This means total income is set to climb to 170 billion riyals (\$45.3 billion) in 1996 compared with projected revenues of 131.5 billion riyals (\$35 billion), an increase of \$10.3 billion.

"This will lead to a great improvement in the bud-

get as nearly 75 per cent of Saudi income comes from oil exports. The deficit could be either sharply trimmed or wiped out for the first time in 10 years," the AMF said.

Saudi Arabia, which controls more than a quarter of the world's recoverable oil reserves, had forecast a budget deficit of \$4.9 billion in 1996, far lower than the record shortfall of \$27.6 billion in 1991.

But Saudi officials said this month they expected the budget to start regaining balance and the shortfall to be eliminated by the year 2000.

Bankers said this could be possible if oil prices remained strong and the kingdom pursued reforms, including privatisations and spending restraint.

"What helps this country is the steady growth in non-oil exports, mainly light industrial products and petrochemicals," a

Saudi banker said.

Saudi Arabia this year took advantage of the surge in oil revenues to repay billions of dollars in arrears to local farmers and contractors. Some of the funds were also set aside for its international reserves as part of Riyadh's plans to replenish those assets after a sharp decline due to the Gulf war.

From a record low of around \$5 billion in 1992, reserves recovered to \$9 billion in 1995 and \$11 billion in May this year. They are expected to be sharply higher by the end of 1996.

The AMF, the Arab League's main financial organisation, said it expected high oil prices to boost Saudi Arabia's economy by six per cent in current prices in 1996. Inflation is not expected to exceed five per cent, it added.

"Regarding the non-oil sector, it showed improvement in the first half of 1996 and is expected to record positive growth rates through the year."

REUTERS • REUTERS •

The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	1.0000	1.5584	0.5914	1.3513	115.81	1.3679	1529.09	1.7470	5.2512
DE Mark	0.6448	1.0000	0.3796	0.8660	74.39	0.8786	981.89	1.1224	3.3738
GB Sterling	1.6908	2.6327	1.0000	2.2830	195.85	2.3128	2584.18	2.9524	8.8750
CHF Franc	0.7400	1.1534	0.4373	1.0000	83.70	1.0120	1131.07	1.2926	3.8846
JP Yen	0.0086	0.0134	0.0059	0.0118	1.0000	0.0087	0.0094	0.0087	0.0087
CA Dollar	0.7310	1.1408	0.4394	0.9793	1.18	1.0000	1121.67	1.2807	3.8558
IT Lira	0.0007	0.0010	0.0004	0.0009	0.0001	0.0008	1.0000	1.142	3.4319
NL Guilder	0.5724	0.9004	0.3382	0.7734	66.26	0.7828	875.46	1.0000	3.0048
FR Franc	0.1904	0.2964	0.1125	0.2574	22.04	0.2605	33.26	33.2600	1.0000

Energy									
Oils	Last	Previous	Mid-East Currencies						
Brent	24.50	24.15	Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	
WTI	22.45	22.15	SA Riyal	0.2867	0.4151	0.15769	0.36052	30.9081	
Bony	24.50	24.15	AE Dirham	0.2723	0.424	0.16114	0.38819	31.5657	
Dubai	21.50	21.45	KW Dinar	3.3356	5.19211	1.97239	4.5106	386.698	
UL Gas	214.00	214.00	BF Dinar	0.3770	4.13052	1.56961	3.5688	307.503	
			CY Pound	2.1191	3.2952	1.2526	2.8625	245.413	

Metal Prices									
Metal	Bid	Offer	Currency Deposit Rates (Bid)						
Gold (oz)	369.1	369.8	Period	1	3	6	9	12	
Silver (oz)	4.5	4.62	Cncy	Month	Months	Months	Months	Year	
Platinum (oz)	368.5	369.9	USD	5.36	5.43	5.46	5.50	5.71	
PALM OIL	1541	1544	GBP	6.37	6.56	6.75	6.75	6.87	
CU (3 Months)	2122	2127	JPY	0.25	0.31	0.34	0.38	0.33	
Zinc (3 Months)	1065	1067	DEM	3.03	3.05	3.08	3.08	3.13	
Lead (3 Months)	0	0	FRF	3.34	3.33	3.33	3.28	3.32	
Ni (3 Months)	6300	6400	CHF	1.69	1.78	1.84	1.84	1.84	
			ITL	7.50	7.18	6.85	6.60	6.52	

Main Equity Indices									
Bourse	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High	Low	Pe Ch		
New York	DOW JONES	6573.59	12.66	0.19	6576.28	6560.52	6560.91		
London	FT-SE 100	4108.5	17.5	0.43	4111.1	4095.3	4091		
Paris	CAC 40	2315.52	6.57	0.37	2321.79	2312.78	2306.95		
Frankfurt	DAX	2888.69	35.81	1.26	2888.69	2883.42	2882.88		

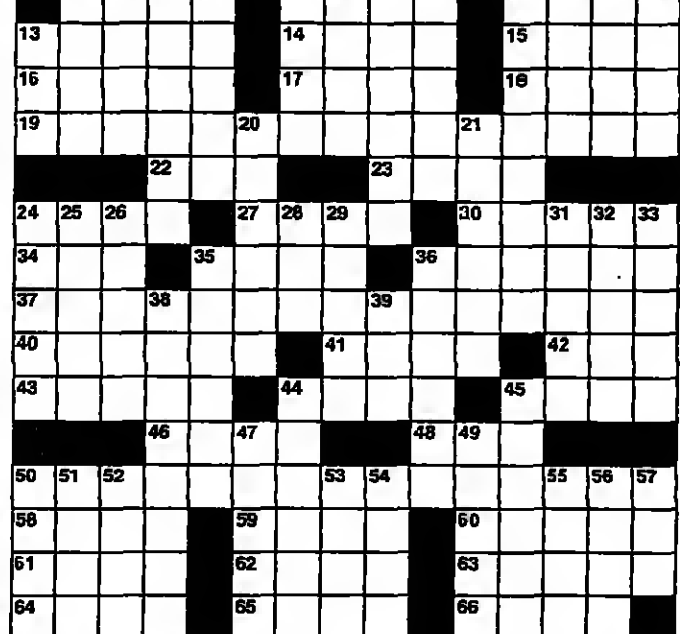
Energy									
Commodity	Last	Delivery	JOD Cross Rates						
Coffee (c/lb)	0	Spot	Currency	Buy	Sell				
Sugar (c/lb)	313.2	Spot	US Dollar	0.708	0.710				
Wheat (c/lb)	21.46	Spot	GB Sterling	1.1947	1.2007				
Soy (c/lb)	21.46	Spot	DE Mark	0.4548	0.4571				
Barley (c/lb)	21.46	Spot	CH Franc	0.5249	0.5275				
Rice (c/lb)	21.46	Spot	FR Franc	0.1351	0.1356				
			JP Yen	0.0096	0.0126				
			NL Guilder	0.4053	0.4073				
			IT Lira	0.622	0.6548				

Source: Central Bank of Jordan.

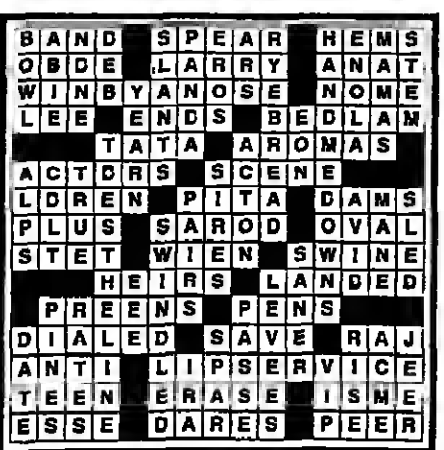
THE Daily Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 One of the musical "Bs"
- 5 Phase
- 9 Formal dance
- 13 Portuguese coin
- 14 Heavy reading
- 15 Lamb
- 16 "e Grecian Um"
- 17 Matures
- 18 Dame Myra
- 19 On a wish list for Santa?
- 22 Nothing
- 23 Gloom's partner
- 24 Moccasins
- 27 Shoshoneans
- 30 Logrolling tournament
- 34 "Do — say, ..."
- 35 Tunisian seaport
- 36 Westerns
- 37 Items in e Christmas song
- 40 Summerizes, briefly
- 41 God of war
- 42 River in Scotland
- 43 Motionless
- 44 List extender
- 45 Helper, abbr.
- 46 Basketball team
- 48 Fond du —
- 50 Something to dream about?
- 58 "Where have you —?"
- 59 Song
- 60 Flambeau
- 61 Rocky projection
- 62 Kind
- 63 Antagonist
- 64 Tennis segments
- 65 Meadow creatures
- 66 Give advice to



by Betty Jorgensen



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- 1 DOWN
- 2 Aid
- 3 Kin of diadems
- 4 Vietnam city
- 5 — of Bethlehem
- 6 Take-out words
- 7 Edits
- 8 Basil based sauce
- 9 Huge beast
- 10 Nautical term
- 11 Tilt
- 12 Eye protector
- 13 Funny DeLuise
- 20 Freshens a pillow
- 21 Pentateuchis
- 24 Father, pref.
- 25 Pele
- 26 Mythical enchantress
- 28 Paving material
- 29 Bishop's permission
- 31 English borough
- 32 Eagles
- 33 Member of an ancient people
- 35 Group of seven
- 36 Peacock feather
- 47 Pester playfully
- 49 Fall flower
- 50 Basics
- 51 "The Way We"
- 45 Part of a play
- 52 Kind of wave
- 53 Put to work
- 54 Dam it
- 55 TV's talking horse
- 56 Pinnacle
- 57 Retiring

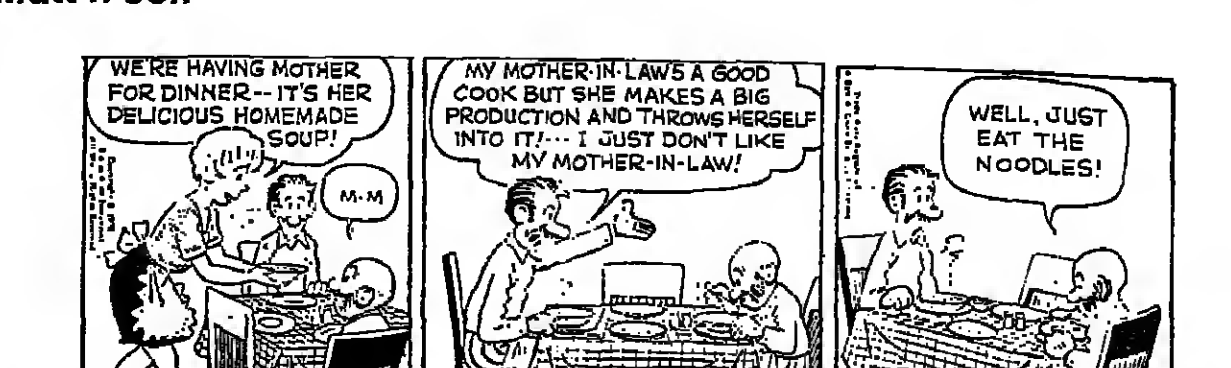
Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff



Busi

Beers

iamond

Government

Hotels

JITC sign

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Yesterday's

De Beers posts record diamond sales in 1996

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — Sales of rough gems by diamond giant De Beers, through its international distribution arm Central Selling Organisation (CSO), hit a record \$4.834 billion in 1996, the company has said.

The 1996 figure was seven per cent higher than the previous year's sales of \$4.5 billion, De Beers said in a statement.

CSO sales for the second half of the year were \$2.1 billion, five per cent higher than in the same period in 1995, despite disruptions in the Indian market caused by the decision of Australian producer, Argyle, to market its gems direct.

De Beers said retail sales in 1996 reflected continuing strength in world demand for diamond jewelry, particularly in the United States.

"Long and medium term prospects for the retail diamond jewellery market remain positive in most parts of the world," it said.

Analysing retail sales in 1995, De Beers said these rose by an estimated five per cent in dollar terms, with the U.S. contributing with an increase of eight per cent.

Retail sales last year in South East Asia — excluding Taiwan — were up by 12 per cent in dollar terms. If Taiwan is included, retail sales in the region were up two per cent.

In Europe, 1995 sales were mixed, with Britain, France and Italy performing well.

Israel's Dead Sea Magnesium begins production

TEL AVIV (R) — Israel's Dead Sea Magnesium, a subsidiary of Dead Sea Works Ltd., has started trial production of magnesium ingots at its plant in Sdom near the Dead Sea, officials have said.

"The plant is now being run in and will begin actual production in April," said Uri Ben-Neon, Dead Sea Magnesium's chairman and president of Dead Sea Works. Dead Sea Works is a unit of Israel Chemicals Ltd.

Dead Sea Magnesium is a joint venture between Israel's Dead Sea Works (65 per cent) and Germany's Volkswagen A.G. (35 per cent). The \$425 million plant will eventually produce 27,000 tonnes of magnesium annually.

The plant makes use of an innovative but commercially untested Russian process for extracting magnesium. "The innovative Russian process has proven to be better than expected," said Mr. Ben-Neon.

Commercial production is scheduled to begin in April 1997 and grow to full-scale production in 1998. A third of the output is earmarked for Volkswagen for use in producing auto parts.

Mr. Ben-Neon said the company was holding discussions with other potential buyers.

At full production, sale are expected to be over \$100 million annually.

The Israeli government has already approved subsidies for the second stage of the project, which calls for doubling production to 55,000 tonnes annually. The plant will make Dead Sea one of the four largest producers of magnesium in the world.

Mr. Ben-Neon said the partners were holding discussions about starting a magnesium dye-casting plant in Dimona, a nearby town. The \$100 million plant would produce auto parts for the German automaker.

UAE banks seen facing project finance challenge

DUBAI (R) — Long-term project financing may be the emerging trend in the booming UAE, but local banks will probably miss out on being key financiers to some \$16 billion worth of planned ventures, analysts have said.

"Local banks are flush with liquidity, but they are at the short-term lending end of the market... They are more into trade and personal finance," said one banker.

Analysts expect United Arab Emirates (UAE) financing requirements for private and joint public-private sector projects in the next five years to exceed 60 billion dirhams (\$16 billion).

Among projects on the agenda is a \$3 billion free-trade zone in Abu Dhabi, a \$12 billion five-year development plan in Dubai, and a number of other schemes including two private industrial estates and a petroleum products manufacturing plant.

Officials have said they expect most of the financing to come from the private sector and foreign firms, some with the backing of foreign banks.

The UAE, with an OPEC quota of 2.161 million barrels a day, is keen to diversify its economy from oil and lure foreign investors and private capital into its economy.

Gulf-based economists said local banks have sufficient means to fund the upcoming ventures, but competition and regulations could make penetrating the project financing market tough.

One obstacle is the increase in foreign partnerships and the proliferation of high-profile international financial institutions loaded with expertise in large-scale financing.

There are 27 foreign banks, 15 representative offices and 19 local banks operating in the UAE.

Another hurdle comes from cash-flush bank depositors.

"The most serious challenge comes from depositors. They would want a piece of the investment cake and they are financially capable of getting it," said a Dubai-based banker.

"This could result in a migration of funds from fixed-term deposits in banks to shares, land or equipment, and in an uneven distribution of funds among banks," he added.

Bankers said that moving funds from fixed deposits into projects could deplete the liquidity of banks used to large deposits. They say a 380 million dirham public offering in September is an example of the dilemma they could face.

The issue by a new insurance company, which was 13 times oversubscribed, led to a cash squeeze at some banks and a glut at the bank managing the subscription.

Central bank rules also limit banks' exposure. In 1994 the ceiling on a bank's loans to a single private institution or borrower was set at seven per cent of capital — a move which prompted most local banks to increase their capital.

"An expansion into large-scale financing would mean another wave of capital increases," said one banker.

Oman approves 360,000-tonne sugar refinery

DUBAI (R) — Oman has allocated land in the Mina Qaboos port for a sugar refinery with a capacity of 360,000 tonnes a year.

Sugar trader Ali Redha Darwish, one of eight businessmen setting up the \$70 million plant, said: "The land has been allocated to us by the ministry of communications in the port, so basically it's all systems go now."

Speaking by telephone from Muscat, Mr. Darwish said the final study into the feasibility of the refinery had been completed, and the "results were extremely positive".

He said 40 per cent of the National Sugar Refinery (NSR) would be floated on the Muscat Stock Exchange once the company had completed its formation, probably in February.

"Sixty per cent of the funds are already committed by the original founders," Mr. Darwish said.

After flotation, NSR will start tendering for refinery equipment and construction.

"The basic idea is that the equipment will come from Germany, or Italy or South Africa, or a mix of the three," he said.

The plant, expected to come on stream in late 1998, will compete in the region with Al Khaleej Refinery in Dubai, which aims at annual capacity of 720,000 tonnes, and a 500,000-tonne refinery in Saudi Arabia, which is due to start production in early 1997.

But the Arabian Peninsula, with annual sugar consumption among the world's highest at an average 30 kilograms per head, is likely to remain a net importer of refined sugar, brokers say.

Daily Beat

Government sells all equity in Jordan Hotels and Tourism Company

** The Jordan Hotels and Tourism, the company that owns Jordan InterContinental Hotel, is now totally in the hands of the private sector after the government, through its investment arm the Jordan Investment Corporation, sold all its equity in the company. The corporation's stake was 30 per cent of the company's JD5 million capital. In the past, the share of the government was 87 per cent but the sale of 1.51 million shares for a total of JD12.47 million on Sunday brought to an end all government interest in the company.

The shares sold by the corporation were bought by Zira for Investment Company through the National Company for Financial Services which is a stock brokerage affiliated to the Cairo Amman Bank. According to Zira Chairman Khalil Talhouni, the deal was effected at the request of the corporation which sought to sell all its equity before the end of the year. He indicated that Zira bought all the shares on offer for its own account as well as the accounts of other investors but "Zira will keep the largest part for its benefit".

The share was sold for JD8.250 although the market price per share has never exceeded JD7.800 (Al Ra'i).

JITC signs contract for Hayat Zaman

** An agreement was signed Sunday to establish and restructure Al Nawafleh Touristic Village in Wadi Musa. The village, called Hayat Zaman, will be a five star hotel and resort and located on 32 dunums, only two kilometres away from Petra.

The project which features building and restructuring houses with an area of 130,000 sq. metres is the third in a series of touristic villages established by the Jordan Touristic Investments Corporation (JITC).

The agreement was signed by JTI Chairman of Board of Directors Ali Ghandour and Samerco Contracting Company Director Samer Tabbaa.

JITC has a number of touristic projects such as the hotel and resort of Taybat Zaman in Wadi Musa, Kan Zaman Village in Yathdeh, and Kan Zaman Karak which is still under construction.

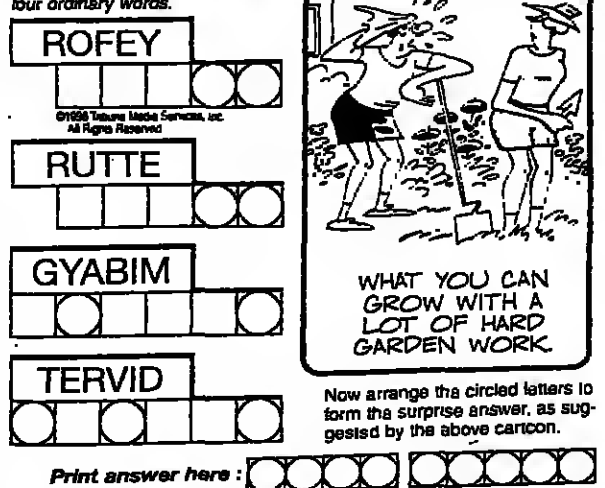
THE BETTER HALF



"Our cat eats squirrels, raccoons, skunks and small dogs. And you're calling the vet because she swallowed a piece of tinsel?"

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.



Print answer here: _____

Yesterday's Jumbles: GRIEF ABHOR KETTLE ASSURE

Answer: Found at a boxing match and a legislature - LEFTS AND RIGHTS

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Miami Heat overcome Milwaukee Bucks for 14th straight road win

MILWAUKEE (R) — Tim Hardaway scored 18 of his season-high 36 points in the fourth quarter as the crippled Miami Heat edged the Milwaukee Bucks 95-94 Sunday for their 14th straight road win.

P.J. Brown added 18 points and 13 rebounds and Isaac Austin had 14 and 11 for Miami, which has the third best road winning streak in NBA history, two off the mark set by the 1971-72 Los Angeles Lakers.

The Heat will have a tough time setting the record when they begin a four-game trip to Utah, Seattle, Portland and the Los Angeles Lakers next Saturday. Utah has the second-longest road streak, winning 15 straight two seasons ago.

The Heat, who have also won their last five overall, dressed only eight players and played seven, as Alonzo Mourning and Sasha Danilovic sat out with lower back strains. Kurt Thomas watched with a sprained right ankle and Gary Grant did not travel due to back spasms.

"My team needed a lift on the offensive end which meant that I had to do a lot of scoring," said Hardaway. "I was fortunate that I was hitting all my shots and led my team. This was a very emotional victory for us."

Vin Baker recorded 26 points and nine rebounds and Glenn Robinson totalled 20 points, eight rebounds and eight assists for Milwaukee, which has lost three straight and five of its last seven. The Bucks have dropped their last 15 meetings with Miami.

"It's a very disappointing loss," said Baker. "We should have played hard enough to beat this team and that is what's most disappointing."

"I think that we made some

bad decisions down the stretch," said rookie Ray Allen. "That's what cost us the game. Not to take credit away from Miami, they played a great game. We still had the opportunities and we slipped on them."

In Indiana, rookie Kerry Kittles scored five of his 28 points in overtime as the New Jersey Nets won consecutive games for the first time this season with a 110-102 victory over the Pacers.

"Kittles is the best rookie I've seen this year," Pacers coach Larry Brown said. "The kid is marvellous."

"I think it was a team effort," Kittles said. "If you show you won't give up, you have a chance to win it."

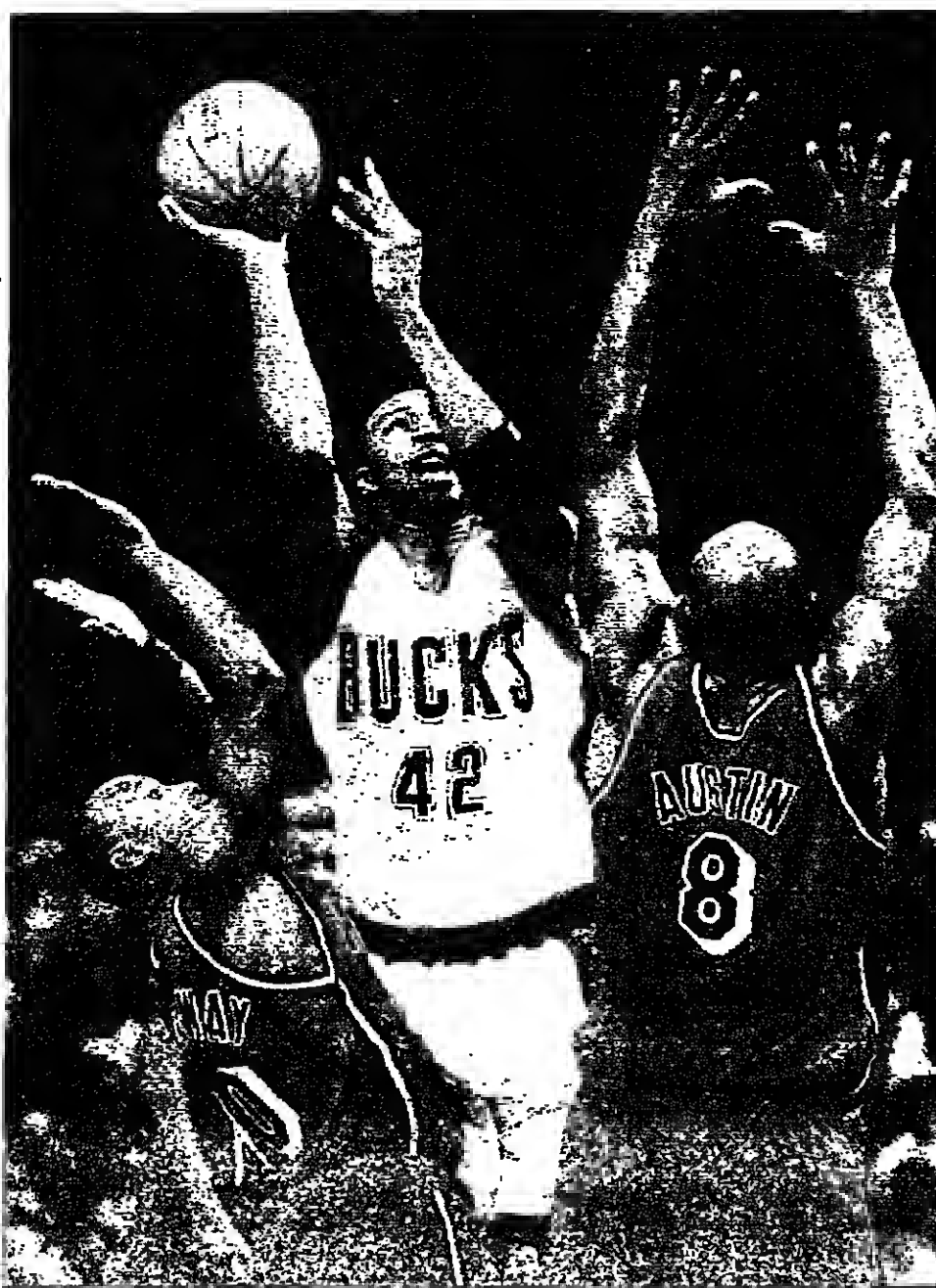
Kendall Gill added 22 points for the Nets, who beat the Pacers at home on Friday and completed a sweep of the home-and-home series. New Jersey (8-18) has won back-to-back contests for the first time since March 19-21, a span of 42 games.

"It was a good one," Nets coach John Calipari said. "We've been in a lot of close games and if we play this way we can win them. We've had three road wins, which says a lot about this team."

"It's always good to beat a team with the calibre of the Pacers," Gill said. "It feels good to win on the road."

Reggie Miller scored 17 of his season-high 37 points in the fourth quarter for Indiana, which has lost five of its last six meetings with New Jersey. The Pacers fell to 5-6 at home and have not been above .500 at Market Square Arena all season.

Shawn Bradley had 20 points, 10 rebounds and four blocks and Khalid Reeves added a season-high 17 points for the Nets, who committed just 14 turnovers.



Milwaukee Bucks' forward Vin Baker scores a field goal with Miami Heat guard Tim Hardaway (left) and centre Keith Austin defending in the second quarter at the Bradley Centre in Milwaukee on Sunday. Miami won 95-94 (Reuters photo)

In Inglewood, California, Shaquille O'Neal scored 28 points and Eddie Jones added 20 as the Los Angeles Lakers

used a big third quarter to pull away from the Philadelphia 76ers 115-102. Rookie Allen Iverson had 21 points and 10 assists and Jerry Stackhouse also scored 21 points for the Sixers, who have lost 12 of their last 13 games.

In Portland, Isaiah Rider scored 19 points and Gary Trent added 17 as the Trail Blazers routed the woeful San Antonio Spurs 110-86. Arvydas Sabonis had 15 points and 11 rebounds and

Kenny Anderson recorded 13 points and nine assists for the Trail Blazers, who have won all three games between the teams this season.

Dominique Wilkins paced the Spurs with 16 points and Monty Williams added 15. The Spurs starting five of Carl Herrera, Sean Elliott, Will Perdue, Avery Johnson, and Vernon Maxwell totalled just 25 points. San Antonio is 3-17 in games without injured centre David Robinson.

World dance medallists to miss Euro figure skating tournament

MOSCOW (AP) — Three-time world ice dancing champions Oksana Grischuk and Yevgeny Platov will miss the European Figure Skating Championships next month in Paris.

The head of the Russian Figure Skating Federation, Valentin Piseyev, made the announcement at the Russian national championships in Moscow on Sunday.

Grischuk and Platov recently changed coaches, moving from Natalya Linichuk in the United States who led them to the gold medal in the 1994 winter Olympics, to Tatiana Tarasova who has coached other world and Olympic champions and also is working in the United States.

The Russian dancers said the change of coaches will cost them training time and will be forced to bypass the European championships in Paris, Jan. 19-26. They intend to compete in the world championships in Lausanne, Switzerland, March 17-23, Piseyev said.

Grischuk and Platov will train in Marlborough, Massachusetts, near Boston, where Tarasova has also been working with Ilya Kulik.

Kulik is the 1995 European men's champion, who was second in the world competition this past March. It will be the second time in three years that Grischuk and Platov will miss the European championships. In 1995, a recurring knee injury to Platov kept them

out of the Europeans but they won the worlds in Birmingham, England, that year.

They have competed sparingly this fall because of Platov's knee injury. They missed the champions series grand prix competitions and recently had their season debut in a ISU open competition in Boston last week. They had to come from behind to beat Russian compatriots Angelika Krylova and Oleg Ovsianikov.

Both Russian ice dance couples missed the Russian national championships, which were completed this weekend in Moscow. Irina Lobacheva and Ilya Averbukh captured the dance competition in the absence of the top-ranked couples.

Scala takes over as Perugia coach

PERUGIA, Italy (R) — Italian Serie A club Perugia said on Sunday they had appointed Nevio Scala as their new coach, replacing Giovanni Galeone.

"We have chosen the best," said club president Luciano Gaucci. "The contract that will tie Scala to Perugia until June 2000 will be signed in the next few days."

He said the ex-Parma coach had asked for a week to sort out his affairs and would take over after Perugia's next match against bottom club Reggiana on Jan. 5.

Scala takes over from Galeone who has had a fiery relationship with Gaucci. He was told to leave after Perugia's match against Bologna ended 0-0.

Perugia are currently 14th in the league and the hands-on president has been threatening to sack Galeone, who led the team from Serie B to Serie A this year, for months.

Scala left Parma at the end of last season, making way for Carlo Ancelotti, after taking the provincial club to victory in the UEFA Cup and the European Cup Winners' Cup.

He had been one of several names linked to the job of

to be replaced this season, after Cagliari's Gregorio Perez, Reggiana's Mircea Lucescu and AC Milan's Oscar Washington Taharez.

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SECTION 1. INVITATION FOR BIDS ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE WATER AUTHORITY OF JORDAN INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)
Date: 31/12/1996
Loan No.: 89 66 400
IFB No.: 26/96/KW/AGWA/GA
1. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has received a loan from Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau in Deutsche Marks for the Water Supply of Greater Amman. It is intended that part of the proceeds of this loan will be applied to eligible payments under the contract(s) for which this IFB has been issued.
2. The Water Authority now invites sealed bids from bidders in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Federal Republic of Germany (eligible bidders) for supply and installation of computer hardware and peripherals for the WAJ Amman Governorate Computerisation.
3. Interested eligible bidders may obtain further information from, and inspect the bidding documents at the office of the Secretary General, Tenders Division, Water Authority, P.O. Box 2412, Amman, Jordan, Tel. 680100, Tlx. 22439 WAJ JO, Fax 679143.
4. A complete set of the tender documents may be purchased by any interested eligible bidder on the submission of a written application to the above and upon payment of a non-refundable fee of JD150.
5. All bids must be submitted in separate envelopes, marked "technical" and "financial," be accompanied by a security in the amount of JD5,000 (in words: five thousand Jordan Dinars) and must be delivered to the office not later than 1200 hours, Jordan local time, on Wednesday, 15/1/1997.
6. Thursday, 9/1/1997, is the last day set for the purchasing of tender documents.
Eng. Koussal Quteishat
Secretary General
Water Authority

TODAY AT	CINEMA TEL:634144 PHILADELPHIA A Rob Cohen film - Sylvester Stallone DAYLIGHT Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30 PHILADELPHIA "2" Richard Gere, Sian Connery & Julia Ormond...In FIRST KNIGHT Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	CINEMA TEL:699238 PLAZA * The Hunchback of Notre Dame Shows: 10:30, 12:00, 1:30, 5:00 * RANSOM Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:45, 11:00	CINEMA TEL:677420 CONCORD CONCORD "1" Robert Deniro & Welsly Snipes...In DIABOLIQUE Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:00, 8:15, 10:30 CONCORD "2" DIABOLIQUE Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	Ammoun Theatre & Cinema TEL: 618274 - 618275 Today presents Zawad Weld Awad theatre group in the play entitled Five-Star Government Starring comedians: Mahmoud Salmeh & Hussein Tubishat Play starts 8:30 p.m.	Nabil & Hisham's Theatre TEL: 625155 The theatre is closed from Dec. 15, 1996 until the start of the Holy Month of Ramadan in order to prepare for a new play entitled "Al Aman Ya Ho"
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Cyprus Football Association meet on match-fixing claims

NICOSIA (R) — The Cyprus F.A. is due to meet later on Monday to seek police aid in their probe into allegations of match fixing in a World Cup qualifier against Bulgaria on Dec. 14.

Members of the federation are due to ask for police intervention to investigate claims players in the national team placed heavy bets on losing to Bulgaria, a key member said on Monday.

The allegations, reported extensively by the local media, do not mention any specific player, but football authorities admit that the

sums bet on the match — up to 10 times the normal — are enough to arouse suspicion.

Cyprus lost 3-1 to Bulgaria in Limassol. "What aroused our suspicions was that usually around £3,000 (\$6,400) is placed on such games and this time £30,000 was placed in bets," Cyprus F.A. Vice Chairman Costas Koutsokoumis told a parliamentary inquiry.

The F.A. official said bookmakers even rejected bets because the sums placed made them suspi-

cious. But Koutsokoumis said he thought the possibility of drawing a link between the bets and the players was unlikely.

"I can only say the performance of some players (in the qualifying match) was not as it normally is in other games," he said.

"But this could easily be countered with an excuse like they had the flu or were not feeling well."

The F.A. is pushing for a ban on all betting involving national teams and local teams, he said.

Arsenal warm to Arsene

LONDON (R) — When Arsene Wenger was named manager of Arsenal in September, weeks after the dramatic pre-season sack- ing of Bruce Rioch, the response of many at Highbury was incredulous: Arsene who?

England manager Glenn Hoddle put in a good word for his former mentor at Monaco but for the most part Wenger was regarded as an unsuitably low-key name for one of the biggest clubs in English club foot- ball.

A few months on and Wenger's Arsenal are holding their own with Liverpool and Manchester United at the top of the Premier League, despite the setback of a 2-2 home draw against Aston Villa on Saturday.

The age-old taunt of "boring Arsenal" has been silenced and players and fans alike have warmed to the bespectacled, quietly-spoken Frenchman.

"Arsene Wenger's brilliant," midfielder Paul Merson enthused. "I can see how he inspired Glenn Hoddle to become a manager. I always said I would not want to manage but now I'd love to get into it."

"His ideas are so good. Even running is done with the ball. We never used to do that, we'd just run for three hours."

Merson, who scored a stunning goal on Saturday, is back in the England squad and playing some of

the best football of his up-and-down career now the Frenchman is in charge.

Wenger, who came to north London from Japanese club Grampus Eight, has dispensed with Arsenal's infamous flat back four, allowing defend- ers to venture forward more often.

"I'm pushing into areas I only used to visit at dead- ball kicks," said Arsenal captain and England centre- back Tony Adams. "I love it when the crowd sing 'Tony Adams on the wing'."

Ian Wright, who never saw eye to eye with Rioch, is smiling again and tops the Premier League scoring table with 15 goals.

True, Arsenal twice let slip the lead on Saturday because of uncharacteristic lapses of concentration in defence, but they compensated with a fine attacking first-half performance which left Villa floundering.

The Gunners now face a tricky new year without Wright, banned for three matches after being sent off at Nottingham Forest nine days ago.

But if they come through that unscathed, and if Wright retains his goal-scoring touch, Wenger's Arsenal could realistically be on course for an 11th league title.

"Maybe I'm an optimist," Wenger warned on Saturday. "But I think this team can do very well in the second half of the season."

Russian striker may lose eye after robbery

BRUSSELS (R) — Russian striker Kyrill Varaxine, who was set to move to Belgian club Ekeren from CSKA Moscow, may lose an eye after being knocked on the head during a robbery at the house of former Belgian international Jean-Marie Pfaff.

"It's very bad and there's only a small chance (he will be able to keep the eye)," a nurse at Middelheim Hospital in the northern city of Antwerp told Reuters.

But a news agency report that doctors had not been able to save Varaxine's right eye was premature. "Doctors can only be cer-

tain after the swelling in the eye has gone down," she said.

The 22-year-old Varaxine, who was due to play for Ekeren from January, also suffered concussion and a broken nose when he was hit with a candlestick when five men broke into Pfaff's villa last Thursday.

Pfaff, a former Belgium and Bayern Munich goal- keeper, was absent at the time. One of his daughters and her friend were tied up and threatened with a knife but left unharmed.

Ekeren were not immedi- ately available for com- ment.

Chicago to study prospect for hosting 2008 Olympics

CHICAGO (AFP) — Chicago civic and business leaders have set up a task force to look into the feasibility of hosting the 2008 Olympics, officials said.

They noted that the Democratic Party's national convention here last August had helped bolster Chicago's image as "the city that works" and said hosting the Olympics would give the city an even bigger boost.

The feasibility study has the blessing of Mayor Richard Daley, who in the past had voiced concern about the cost of staging the Olympics.

Mayoral spokeswoman Lisa Howard said the study would help the city determine whether it can compete for other national and international worldwide competitions.

The 20-member task force, unveiled last week, is to spend \$500,000 on the study which will be submitted to Daley and Illinois Governor Jim Edgar by June.

Press reports however quoted Olympic officials as saying no U.S. city is likely to be allowed to host the Olympics before the year 2012 as Salt Lake City was recently awarded the 2002 winter games and Atlanta hosted the summer games this year.

Chicago boasts some first-class sporting facilities, including the United Centre, home of the world-famous Chicago Bulls basketball team and a newly expanded complex where nine different competitions could be staged at once.

But the city would need to build a new aquatic centre to be able to handle Olympic swimming events. Its tennis facilities also would need to be upgraded.

Injured Rosset forfeits but Swiss still win

PERTH, Australia (R) — A back injury forced Marc Rosset to forfeit his singles match in the Hopman Cup mixed team event on Monday but brilliant tennis by teenage teammate Martina Hingis carried Switzerland to a 2-1 victory over Romania.

Rosset was unable to play Adrian Panu, giving the Romanians an early advantage, but world number six Hingis levelled the tie after disposing of Irina Spirlen.

Rosset recovered sufficiently to play the doubles and he and Hingis defeated the Romanians to clinch the tie.

Rosset has been receiving intensive treatment since hurting his back on Saturday during practice.

He told reporters his condition improved during the Group B match and was confident of playing in the next game against South Africa on Wednesday.

"I think in 48 hours a lot of good things can happen," he said. "Right now there is no pain and at the end of the doubles I was actually feeling much better than in the beginning."

It was the second time in as many Hopman Cup ties that an injury has stopped him from playing.

The first time — the final against Croatia earlier this year — was far more embarrassing. On that occa-

sion he injured his hand after smashing an advertising boarding in a fit of rage to give the Croats their first title.

Hingis, 16, was pressed early on by Spirlen but finished strongly to win 7-5 6-2 to ensure the mixed doubles was a 'live' match.

Rosset looked relatively comfortable although he received treatment once in a match the second seeds had hoped to wrap up in straight sets to lessen the strain on Rosset's back.

The Romanians refused to follow the script, taking the first set before Rosset and Hingis fought back to clinch the tie with a 3-6 7-5 6-3 win in just under two hours.

Third seeds South Africa scored a comfortable victory over Germany in the other Group B tie with Ananda Coetzee and Wayne Ferreira winning their singles ties in straight sets.

The South Africans then combined to win the doubles, also in straight sets, to take the tie in a clean sweep.

World number 10 Ferreira scored his first win in five singles outings at the Hopman Cup when he brushed aside Bernd Karbacher in 85 minutes, hitting nine aces to the German's two in a 6-4 6-4 victory.



SWEDISH PLAYER RETURNS SERVE TO MOROCCAN: Swedish player Patrik Fredriksson returns a serve to Morocco's Karim Alami during first round action at the \$635,000 Qatar Open tennis tournament Monday. Fredriksson won the match 6-2 6-2 (Reuters photo)

Cherkasov vindicates hardcourt wild card to oust seeded Furlan

ADELAIDE, Australia (AFP) — Russian Andrei Cherkasov, given a wild card on the intervention of compatriot and training partner Yevgeny Kafelnikov, ousted seeded Italian Renzo Furlan in the first round of the Australian Hardcourt Tennis Championship here Monday.

The Russian, ranked 149th in the world, gained direct entry into the tournament with the wild card after tournament top seed and world No.3 Kafelnikov lobbied organisers for Cherkasov to be included in the draw.

Cherkasov eliminated seventh seeded Furlan, 4-6, 6-4, 6-4.

"I would also be frustrated if I did not get a wild card in Russia," Cherkasov said of local players' criticism of his favourable treatment.

"It's always nice to get a wildcard, it's the third time I have got a wild card here in Adelaide and I am from Russia!"

"I am very thankful to Yevgeny Kafelnikov, who wanted me to get a wild card, and also to the tournament director Colin Stubbs."

"It was especially nice to win today. I play a seeded player and it was not easy to win. I had to run a lot and work hard."

Two other seeds overcame first round opponents, with Germany's David Prinosil accounting for Slava Dosedel of the Czech Republic 6-3 6-2 and American Alex

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Gulf states could reinstate Israel boycott — Oman

KUWAIT (R) — Gulf Arab states could reinstate a boycott they had lifted on firms dealing with Israel if it did not implement Middle East peace accords, Oman's minister of state for foreign affairs said in remarks published on Monday.

"Continuation of this policy that freezes every agreement between Arabs and Israel would make us take steps that we do not desire, that is reconsidering all contacts with them and even the partial normalisation that had taken place," Youssef Ben Alawi Ben Abdullah said.

He made his comments in an interview with Kuwait's Al Rai Al Aam newspaper.

"We have told them (the

Israelis) that even the issue of the lifting by Gulf states of the secondary and tertiary boycott could be reconsidered," the Omani minister said.

"I believe this opinion is not exclusive to Oman. It (is shared) by all Arab states that have ties with Israel and which have started these ties originally to facilitate and encourage the peace process," he added.

But he said that there were "some indications that the Israeli government started to comprehend facts and to reverse its former policy."

The Gulf states — Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates — have lifted a decades-old boycott of

firms and institutions that deal with Israel, the so-called secondary and tertiary boycott.

Oman and Qatar have forged ahead of other Gulf states in establishing economic relations with Israel though they have stopped short of full diplomatic relations pending a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace.

They are the only countries in the Gulf region to have allowed Israel to start trade missions and Oman has a trade representative in Israel.

Both states have said they have frozen ties with Israel following what they see as hardline policies by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

Iran sees as futile Arab stand on missile deployment in Gulf

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran on Monday dismissed as "futile" criticism by eight Arab states of its deployment of missiles on three disputed Gulf islands, saying they were needed for defensive purposes.

"Iran will take any measure it deems necessary for its defense on its territory, including the islands in the Persian Gulf," Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati told a news conference.

"We reserve the right to self-defence," Signatories of the so-called Damascus Declaration, including the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) together with Syria and Egypt, issued a statement at the end of a two-day ministerial meeting in Cairo on Sunday expressing "strong concern" about Iran's deployment of

ground-to-ground missiles in the Gulf, including the three islands.

Iran's action represents a "direct threat to the GCC countries and their strategic sites," the statement said, calling on Tehran to "abstain from all measures likely to compromise secu-

urity and stability in the Gulf region."

The GCC is made up of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Iran is locked in a dispute with the UAE over the islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb and Abu Dhabi's position is supported by the GCC as well as Egypt and Syria.

Without specifically referring to the missiles, Mr. Velayati rejected accusations that Iran's "defensive measures" posed a threat to its neighbors across the Gulf.

"This should not be interpreted as an aggressive and hegemonic move," he said calling the Arab statement "regrettable and futile."

"These kind of decisions are futile. They do not help regional cooperation and serve the interests of the United States and the Zionist regime," the minister said.

"Instead of forming a bloc against the hegemonic designs of Israel, these countries take a stand

against Iran to the pleasure of the United States and the Zionist regime," he complained.

Mr. Velayati said Iran's defence budget was "far less" than those of the Gulf Arab countries.

Signed in 1991 after the Gulf war to facilitate economic and security cooperation between Arab members of the U.S.-led coalition which drove Iraqi troops from Kuwait, the Damascus Declaration has never been implemented.

Besides the dispute with the UAE, Iran is accused by Bahrain of fomenting Shiite Muslim unrest in the Gulf archipelago.

The Damascus declaration states affirmed the UAE's right to the sovereignty of the three islands and "reiterated their demand to the Iranian government to bring its occupation to an end."

They also called on Tehran to stop building installations on the islands and urged the use of peaceful means, such as the International Court of Justice, to resolve the dispute.

Baghdad, KDP reached autonomy deal — report

ANKARA (AFP) — The Iraqi government and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) have reached an agreement in principle on autonomy for mainly Kurdish northern Iraq, a newspaper reported Monday.

The English-language Turkish daily news quoted diplomatic sources as saying that the agreement followed a secret visit to Baghdad by KDP leader Massud Barzani on Dec. 11 and 12.

The newspaper said that a rival Iraqi Kurdish group, the Patriotic Union Of Kurdistan (PUK), of Jalal Talabani, was also involved in talks on rapprochement with the Baghdad government.

"It is a matter of time for the autonomy agreement to be announced," a diplomatic source told the newspaper.

"The Iraqi government has already started reinstating its authority in the (KDP-controlled) region by sending back the public administra-

tion departments it withdrew more than five years ago," the source said.

The Turkish Daily News did not give details of the reported autonomy deal, and KDP and PUK officials in the Turkish capital were not available for comment on the report.

Fighting flared in northern Iraq in late August when the KDP, supported by Iraqi troops, attacked the PUK and gained control of the Kurdish "capital" Erbil and most of northern Iraq.

The PUK regained much of the lost ground in a counter-offensive but Erbil remains in the hands of the Baghdad-backed KDP.

Ending two months of clashes, the two sides declared a ceasefire on Oct. 23 after heavy diplomatic pressure by the United States.

The truce has been holding in northern Iraq, but the warring Kurdish factions have still not signed a peace

accord.

"Now the atmosphere in northern Iraq is far more suitable than before for an agreement between the Baghdad government and the two Kurdish leaders," Turkey's former ambassador to Washington, Sukru Elekdog, told the newspaper.

The report on the autonomy deal followed last week's move by Turkey, the United States and Britain to agree to continue surveillance flights by allied aircraft over northern Iraq to protect the Kurds from potential attacks by Iraqi army.

Citing differences with the other Western allies, France said it would not take part in the new air mission.

The new mission replaced operation provide comfort, which was created after nearly 500,000 Kurds massed near the Turkish border in May 1991 to flee attacks by Iraqi troops in the wake of the Gulf war.

Israel on alert for attacks in Turkey

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The Israeli secret service is concerned about possible attacks against Israeli interests in Turkey by a radical Palestinian group and Syrian-backed Kurdish separatists, the Haaretz newspaper said Monday.

The paper said the fears were raised by recent contacts between members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) of George Habash and the Turkish separatist Kurdish Labour Party (PKK).

Haaretz said that according to Israeli experts, Kurdish rebels have set up a network in Europe which they have used for attacks against Turkish interests in the past, notably in Germany, and which could also be turned against Israel.

Israel and Turkey recently signed a military cooperation agreement.

According to Lebanese press reports, Israeli aircraft targeted Kurdish installa-

tions in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley a year ago as part of raids on Iranian-backed Hizbollah guerrillas. The reports have been denied here.

Haaretz also reported Monday that the Israeli secret service fears a spectacular attack by the Palestinian groups Hamas or Islamic Jihad around Jan. 5.

The date coincides with the first anniversary of the killing by suspected Israeli agents of Palestinian Yahya Ayyash, the so-called "engineer" of a number of suicide bombings in Israel.

Haaretz also reported that Israeli intelligence had alerted the Palestinian National Authority about the possibility of PFLP suicide-bombings in the West Bank or Gaza Strip aimed at sabotaging an Israeli-Palestinian accord on an Israeli military withdrawal from the West Bank city of Hebron.



JUBILATION: Palestinians sing outside a store in the centre of Hebron as an Israeli soldier patrols past on Monday after reports said the Palestinian National Authority and Israel were expected to reach a Hebron deal and Israeli troops would withdraw from most of the town within a week (Reuters photo)

Government is 'committed' to streamlining its equity holdings in press establishments

By P.V. Vivekanand
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The government is committed to streamlining its equity in newspaper companies by mid-January but the actual transfer of shares to the private sector depends on how the legal status of the Social Security Corporation (SSC) is defined, according to Information Minister Marwan Muasher.

The Press and Publications Law of 1994 stipulates that the government should not hold more than 30 per cent equity in any press establishments.

That stipulation was never complied with because of differing definitions to the status of the SSC, which, along with the Jordan Investment Corporation (JIC), an outright state investment agency, holds equities in newspaper establishments.

Consecutive governments since the law went into effect have argued that the SSC is not a government agency and as such its holdings should not be considered as an arm of the state.

The counter-argument says that the SSC, which also holds investments in the tourism and industrial sectors, is a state agency because the government is in direct control of the corporation and appoints its director-general.

SSC officials reject the idea that the corporation is a government organisation.

"The corporation cannot be described as a state organisation simply because the government appoints its director-general," said a senior SSC official recently.

"The corporation does not receive any government funding and all SSC operations are run independent of the government," according to the official.

Dr. Muasher told a press briefing on Monday that a "legal committee" was currently studying the status of

those entities, observers noted.

The JIC holds 15 per cent and the SSC holds 46 per cent of the shares of the Jordan Press Foundation Company Limited, which publishes the Jordan Times and Al Rai, Jordan's largest Arabic-language daily.

The SSC holds 30 per cent of the Jordan Press and Publications Company Limited, which publishes the Al Dustour Arabic daily.

The government ownership in Jordanian newspaper establishments came about when the state, using martial law powers in force then, took control of the entities in 1989 and paid off all their shareholders. It also named own administrators to run the companies.

In 1990, the move was partially reversed. The original shareholders and managements were reinstated, but the equity was fully returned to them.

However, if the legal committee determines that the SSC is not a state agency, then the need for government to let go of its equity in newspaper companies is nullified since the state holdings in such organisations are already less than 30 per cent ceiling. At the same time, it would also allow the government to exercise indirect control over the media institutions by virtue of the continued SSC holdings in

the mountains some 60 kilometres east of Sanaa, the Yemeni capital.

In Warsaw, the Polish news agency PAP identified the tourists as Zbigniew Hauser, a journalist who is leading the group, Ewa and spouse Leslaw Adamski who are physicists.

Lutka Soholewska, an engineer, and Henryk Amerski.

The three men and two women aged between 57 and 64 left Poland on December 10 on a two-month trip to Yemen and Africa.

According to a police spokesman, the kidnappers are seeking to put pressure on the government to obtain financial compensation for damage done by flooding in June.

In Warsaw, the Polish Foreign Ministry said the five will be released soon.

"We hope for the quickest possible release...A second round of negotiations is taking place, but talks take time, they usually last several days," the ministry's spokesman, Pawel Dobrowolski, told Reuters.

Similar abduction cases have occurred in the past and were resolved peacefully, he said.

In recent years, tribes in Yemen with grievances against the government or foreign oil firms have kidnapped tourists or other foreigners to use in bargaining. The tribes' demands have usually involved land or water issues, and have rarely been political.

PARIS (AFP) — French President Jacques Chirac stressed Monday the importance of France's ties with Lebanon as a key part of Paris' overall Middle East policy.

In an opinion piece in the Lebanese daily Al Safir he reiterated French policy on other Middle East issues including Syria and the Palestinians.

Lebanon was one of three "key axes" in France's Middle East policy: "Unity around the Mediterranean, support for the peace process and backing for Lebanon's renaissance," he said.

French policy in the Middle East "would not be what it is" without France's "specific relationship" with Lebanon, he said.

On other Middle East issues, Mr. Chirac backed Palestinians' right to a state, and called for talks on its status and such thorny issues as Jerusalem, refugees and Jewish settlements to begin urgently.

On Syria, he backed Damascus' claim on the Golan Heights, while agreeing that Israel has legitimate security concerns. "France is following this issue closely and is concerned about reemerging tensions," he said.

Overall Paris would continue to "support those involved in the peace process" using its "good relations with all sides," he said.

COLUMBIA

Queen Elizabeth plans major celebration

LONDON (AFP)

Having had it up to here with her children's divorces, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II is thinking of celebrating her 50th wedding anniversary next year in grand style.

Buckingham Palace revealed on Sunday that the queen and Prince Philip, who were married in November 1947, are toying with the idea of inviting thousands of other long-married couples to a "joint celebration" garden party.

"But before any announcement can be made, all the practicalities have to be considered," a royal spokesman said. If it goes ahead, the bash should go some way to erasing the bad memories of the past year's sensational divorces of Prince Charles from Princess Diana, and of Prince Andrew from the former Sarah Ferguson.

Solti wants to produce Mozart or Verdi opera

BONN (AFP)

Veteran international conductor Georg Solti would like to produce an opera by Mozart or Verdi before he dies, he confessed to the German magazine Der Spiegel in an interview published Monday.

"I've often wanted to do it, but I lacked the courage," said the 84-year-old Hungarian-born former conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, adding: "Perhaps I'll succeed in staging a production of Mozart or Verdi before I die."

The career of naturalised British citizen has spanned more than 60 years, from rehearsal pianist for the great Arturo Toscanini to musical director of the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in London. He later moved to Chicago, and appears as guest conductor in Europe and the United States.

Solti told Der Spiegel he would no longer conduct Richard Wagner's ring operatic cycle because he felt there were no longer any great singers like such past giants as Birgit Nilsson, Wolfgang Windgassen or Hans Hotter. "These personalities of artistic genius are gone," he said.

Alberti hospitalised

CADIZ, Spain (AFP) — Rafael Alberti, one of the greatest living Spanish poets, was hospitalised on Saturday with severe respiratory problems, doctors said. The condition of the 94-year-old poet has improved since being admitted to the hospital in Puerto de Santa Maria in the southern Cadiz region, but he remains in a serious condition, they added. The poet, a militant communist since 1933, is the last living member of the 27 generation, which was one of the most important waves in Spanish literature. He is a unique witness to the political and cultural changes that have taken place in Spain during the 20th century. Alberti was friends with Federico Garcia Lorca, Pablo Picasso, Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali. In 1983 he received the Cervantes Prize, considered the highest award for Hispanic literature.

Mireille passes away

PARIS (AFP) — Mireille, one of France's best loved singers, actresses and composers of French chanson died here Sunday aged 90 after a 60-year career in which she once starred with such Hollywood names as Buster Keaton and Charles Boyer.

Mireille, born Mireille Hartuch, co-wrote some 600 French popular songs, including "Couches dans le foin" (Lying in the Hay) and "Une Demoiselle Sur Une Balançoire" (Girl on a Swing), and latterly ran a special Paris "petit conservatoire de la chanson" whose graduates included singer and actress Francoise Hardy.